Under the Northern Lights

My Memories of Life in the Finnish Community of Northern Ontario

Nelma Sillanpää
Edited by Edward W. Laine

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Main photo: Nelma at the age of two, with her parents, Leonard and Tilda Johnson, 1919.

Small photos, top to bottom:
1. Nelma Johnson's aunt Saimi, 1924.
2. Paul Sillanpää with brother Bill and his wife, Sylvia, Yellowknife, N.W.T., 1946.
3. Nelma's husband, Paul Sillanpää, Yellowknife, N.W.T., 1946.
4. The young bride, Nelma Sillanpää, Yellowknife, N.W.T., 1946.

Back cover:
Nelma, on her seventy-fifth birthday, 1992.

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Abstract

What was it like for young immigrant girls growing up in the lumber camps and mining towns of Northern Ontario in the 1920s? How did teenagers in Canada cope with the Great Depression of the "Dirty Thirties"? What did young women on the home front do during World War II while their menfolk were overseas with the Canadian armed forces? Nelma Sillanpää, author of *Under the Northern Lights*, faced those issues over the course of her life and, like so many other Canadian women of her generation, subsequently married, raised a family and, eventually, became a widow.

As a Canadian of Finnish origin, Nelma Sillanpää participated in the institutional life and activities of the Finnish-Canadian community through her work in the Finnish-Canadian cooperative movement, as well as through her long-held interest in sports and drama. She also joined in the religious life of her community as a member of both the United and Finnish Lutheran churches and their auxiliaries. As well, she has been active in various home and school associations, cub and scout auxiliaries, and is still heavily involved with the local chapter of the Kidney Foundation in Elliot Lake. Despite the many adversities she has faced in her long life, she has met every challenge with the legendary *sisu* (in Finnish, guts or fortitude) which she modestly ascribes to her Finnish heritage.

In her delightfully written, warm, human, and oft-times humorous and poignant portrait of her life and times, *Under the Northern Lights*, Nelma Sillanpää shows us what ordinary life has been like for many women in Canada over the last 75 years. Because it also describes her involvement in the activities of the Finnish community of Northern Ontario, Mrs. Sillanpää's autobiography serves as an important historical document. It illuminates a largely unknown chapter of Canada's diverse multicultural heritage.

Dr. Edward W. Laine, editor of *Under the Northern Lights*, is Ethnocultural Historian at the Canadian Museum of Civilization and one of Canada's leading scholars on the history of the Finnish-Canadian community and Finland. His introduction and historical annotations, his selection of Nelma Sillanpää's own photographs, maps, bibliography, and index, enrich the value of *Under the Northern Lights* as a historical resource and add to our understanding of the Finnish-Canadian past.

Résumé

Quel était donc le lot des jeunes immigrantes qui, au cours des années 20, grandissaient dans les chantiers forestiers et les villes minières du nord de l'Ontario? Comment les jeunes Canadiens ont-ils vécu la grande noirceur des années 30? Au cours de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, quelle a été la contribution des jeunes Canadiennes à l'effort de guerre pendant que leur mari combattait outre-mer sous la bannière des Forces armées canadiennes? Nelma Sillanpää, auteure de l'ouvrage *Under the Northern Lights* a vécu cette époque de notre histoire et, comme bien d'autres Canadiennes de sa génération, s'est par la suite mariée, a élevé une famille, puis est devenue veuve.

À titre de Canadienne d'origine finlandaise, Nelma Sillanpää a participé à la vie institutionnelle et aux activités de la communauté finno-canadienne en contribuant au mouvement coopératif finno-canadien et en manifestant un intérêt soutenu pour les sports et les arts de la scène. À titre de membre de l'Église unie et de l'Église luthérienne finlandaise — et de leurs groupes affiliés — elle a également contribué à la vie religieuse de sa communauté; en outre, elle a joué un rôle actif au sein de diverses associations familiales ou scolaires et de groupes satellites des louveteaux et des scouts. Elle est encore, à l'heure actuelle, membre active de la section locale de la Fondation canadienne du rein, à Elliot Lake. En dépit des vicissitudes de sa longue existence, elle a relevé chaque défi avec le légendaire *sisu* (en finlandais, «audace» ou «force d'âme») qu'elle attribue, en toute modestie, à ses origines finlandaises.

Dans *Under the Northern Lights*, cette fresque exquise, chaleureuse, humaine, souvent humoristique et émouvante de la vie et de l'époque qui sont les siennes, Nelma Sillanpää brosse un portrait de la vie quotidienne d'un grand nombre de Canadiennes, qui couvre trois quarts de siècle. L'autobiographie de M^me^ Sillanpää, du fait qu'elle s'inscrit sur la toile de fond des activités de la communauté finlandaise du nord de l'Ontario, constitue un document historique d'importance. Elle met en lumière une des facettes peu explorées de la mosaïque multiculturelle canadienne.

Edward W. Laine, éditeur intellectuel de l'ouvrage *Under the Northern Lights*, occupe un poste d'historien ethnoculturel au Musée canadien des civilisations. Ses travaux, sur les thèmes de la communauté finno-canadienne et de la Finlande, font de lui un des chercheurs canadiens les plus érudits en la matière. L'introduction et les annotations historiques de M. Laine dans *Under the Northern Lights*, ainsi que les photographies de Nelma Sillanpää, les cartes, la bibliographie et l'index qu'il a fournis, confèrent à l'œuvre une portée historique et contribuent à notre compréhension de l'histoire finno-canadienne.

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Introduction

Writ large in the mandate of the Canadian Museum of Civilization are these two prime objectives: first is the acquisition and preservation for posterity of artifacts and other significant evidence documenting the nature, diversity and richness of Canada's multicultural heritage; and second is the dissemination of knowledge concerning that evidence to the general public. As the Museum's Ethnocultural Historian, one of my tasks is to find new avenues for furthering those objectives within the framework of my own discipline—history. The challenge is exciting but, I also must confess, not always easily met.

While it is incumbent upon every historian working in a museum to treat the human past as much as possible in terms of its material culture, it is sometimes too limiting for us to rely exclusively, or even predominantly, on artifact-based research and documentation. The fact is that, when viewed as a class of historical evidence relating to past human activity, artifacts in themselves enshrine only an incomplete account of the historical development of their makers and former possessors. For example, who would dare claim that the unique "old country" folk-arts and -crafts maintained by an ethnocultural community in this country actually represent the totality of its current Canadian identity, experience and existence? Why then should we treat that community's past any differently in a museum context?

Then again, even the seemingly simple matter of ascribing an individual artifact to a given community can be extremely problematical in the context of a multicultural society. To whose material culture does

an artifact really belong when it has been created by one ethnocultural community, but has been principally owned and used by another? If the possession and use of an object "ethnicizes" it, then should we not also be documenting Canada's multicultural heritage through the acquisition and exhibition of common household appliances—for example, television sets—previously owned and used by members of the different ethnocultural communities, but originally imported from abroad and widely sold by Eaton's, Sears or some other mass retailer? I think not! How then, you might well ask, does one seek to document more of our multicultural past?

By chance, midst one of my periodic ruminations on such matters about a year or two ago, Lennard Sillanpää first approached me concerning the publication of his mother's autobiography by the Museum. His proposal immediately appealed to me. I quickly began to visualize a new volume in the Museum's Mercury Series featuring the reminiscences of a woman of Finnish origin, a work that could provide valuable firsthand information for students of immigration, ethnocultural, women's and social history. I also suspected that no comparable work then existed in the realm of Finnish-Canadian studies.

My subsequent survey of the English-language literature in the field confirmed those suspicions. Although a number of articles and books deal with women in the history of Finnish-Canadian community, only one book-length monograph is dedicated to them: Varpu Lindström-Best's *Defiant Sisters*, a history of Finnish-Canadian immigrant women which, unfortunately, stops short about 1930.[1] In terms of published memoirs and first-person accounts, there is only Lempi Dagmar Mansfield's *Aim for the Broom*, an idiosyncratic, self-published diary showing just how much of a melting-pot Canada could be for a young, impressionable Finnish immigrant girl.[2] Aili Grönlund Schneider's *The Finnish Baker's Daughter*, an autobiographical novel, is too seriously compromised by a vexing mix of fact, fancy and literariness to be of much use as a historical memoir on the Finnish community.[3] Far more satisfying is Lynn Cook's *The Bells of Finland Street*, a novel for juvenile readers peopled with characters in situations lovingly drawn from the author's own Finnish background.[4]

While the bibliography appended to this volume lists the relevant titles that were found in my survey of the literature, I expect that a few useful works may have been inadvertently omitted. I know for a fact that it is especially easy to overlook pertinent sources in local history publications. Indeed, I might even have missed including Nelma Sillanpää's "New Bride at Negus Mine 1945–46" in this survey had Lennard not provided me with a photocopy of his mother's article.[5] It recounts the year she spent in Yellowknife as a new bride, and was excerpted from an earlier draft of *Under the Northern Lights*. Mrs. Sillanpää also has another published article to her credit: "Revontulet Athletic Club of Timmins."[6] Both articles show her to be an accomplished writer graced with exceptional native talent and skill.

If anything, Mrs. Sillanpää's literary powers have since become more formidable. *Under the Northern Lights* not only constitutes an important addition to the Mercury Series for the historical documentation it contains, but it also stands on its own as a delightfully written, warm, poignant, humorous and entertaining account of her rites of passage through life. In it, her writing is marked by two particularly striking qualities: the first is its uncanny ability to transport us back in time to view her childhood experiences with the uncritical, all-seeing innocence of a child's eyes; and the second is its penchant for understatement, especially when dealing with the more painful aspects of her life and times. The latter quality, I suspect, is largely a reflection of an innate sense of reserve, which probably stems from her Finnish heritage and upbringing.

So, while I might have preferred to have Mrs. Sillanpää expand upon certain topics a little more, my main aim as editor of *Under the Northern Lights* was to preserve the work's integrity as a historical memoir. Therefore, I had no wish to tamper with its writing style nor to affect what it chose, or chose not, to say. The copyediting was undertaken with a careful hand to preserve the authenticity of the author's voice, tone and style as well as the historicity of the contents of her work. Suggested revisions were first crafted to match Mrs. Sillanpää's idiom and intent, and then they were sent to her for her consideration. She then approved or modified them to her satisfaction. Rather than subjecting her words to my will, I have annotated her text with the

occasional footnote to supply the interested reader with additional historical information.

To further enhance *Under the Northern Lights'* value as a research tool, I have appended an index as well as the above-mentioned bibliography. The index is designed to highlight various aspects of the material culture and lifestyle of the Finnish-Canadian community. I have also included a complementary selection of historic photographs from Mrs. Sillanpää's personal collection together with several maps showing many of the places mentioned in her work. That said, I should like now to set the broader historical context in which she first found herself as a "new" Canadian.

When Mrs. Sillanpää arrived in this country as a four-year-old child with her Finnish parents, Leonard and Tilda Johnson, Canada was not an altogether hospitable place for most Finnish newcomers. The Canadian public did not always welcome them with open arms. Discrimination, prejudice and racism were rife, even though those dark undercurrents may have not always been apparent to a young child living in the isolated confines of a Northern Ontario lumber camp. Moreover, if Finns had once been eagerly recruited by the Canadian government to become settlers here, that was no longer the case in the 1920s.

Evidence of a strong bias against Finns even appeared in the ranks of the gatekeepers controlling access into this country. For example, A. H. Wilson, a federal immigration officer posted in Fort William, Ontario, was so thoroughly convinced of the undesirability of Finnish immigrants that he conveyed his concerns to his superior, Thomas Gelley, commissioner of immigration in Winnipeg:

> The Finns are good pioneer farmers who will and do put up with many privations and hardships, [settling where] the land is mostly rolling and rough, rock formation, light on heights, muskeg swamps on lower land, farming a hardship at best. There is usually timber which they cut for wood, pulp and domestic, where the fire has not taken its toll. Numbers go to the lumber camps in winter to make some money to carry on, and will stick when other countrymen give up.
>
> They are determined law breakers in some ways, have no regard for game and fishery laws, or the Ontario temperance Act, are professional bootleggers. Numbers are now considered wealthy through distilling and peddling whiskey. They are keen on the use of knives

> mostly of their own make. They are a savage and well made knife made from worn out files highly tempered. They have some bitter quarrels where one or both [of the aggrieved parties] are sure to be hospital patients for a time. From the best authority 85% are radical in their views and with numbers in a district would surely cause trouble unless harsh measures were used. It is claimed they are not so in Finland and dare not. It is after coming to this country where they have more freedom that this develops. The two particularly loyal that I get information from say that if their countrymen knew it would be as much as their life was worth. They settle in colonies mostly in the rougher parts of the country, they first work in lumber and mining camps, where they have freedom and get their education. I would recommend that their immigration to Canada be limited.[7]

George E. Cole, a mining inspector in the employ of the Province of Ontario, alleged that Finnish immigrants were fraudulently entering the country as farmers and farm-hands with the sole intent of taking mining and lumbering jobs away from "real" Canadians. His complaint to Alex. Gillies, assistant divisional commissioner of immigration, was that:

> Coming to this province there are three areas into which they naturally come, Porcupine, Sudbury and Port Arthur for the Finn more than any other European comes to that part where some of his own people have settled. It hardly sounds reasonable that 1600 Finns have come to these areas mentioned and for farming when mining and lumbering are the real industries employing labour.
>
> As a Canadian I desire to see this country go ahead and I would that it could be done with those of British connection or with British ideals but not at the expense of bringing in Finns, or any other settler marked for farming when the real intention is to make miners of them, or even lumbermen. Seeing these people from time to time coming from the trains with their little wooden boxes and met at the station by a countryman who a few days later takes the new arrival to the mines and then later seeing the same individual working in a mine, possessing one word of English and that the commercial noun "job", my mind turns to the real Canadians out of work and seemingly outcast because they speak a language recognized in our parliament and not in that of Finland. . . .
>
> I am cognizant of many virtues that the Finn possesses as a settler and as a working man. I have no quarrel with them except that they do not become British. . . .
>
> As a government official I like to see things correctly done and I do not as a Canadian wish to see any European be he Mongoloid or Nordic

> put anything over those who are trying to make this a land worth living in.[8]

In saying "I do not as a Canadian wish to see any European be he Mongoloid or Nordic put anything over those who are trying to make this a land worth living in," Cole raised the issue of racial origin as a cause for barring the entry of Finns into the country. His argument was predicated on an old nineteenth-century theory—the concept that Finns and Mongols were racially related because their languages were deemed to be linguistically related. In effect, what he was actually recommending to the Canadian government was that it should begin treating the Finns like Asians, who then constituted a highly restricted, if not entirely excluded, class of immigrants for entry into Canada.

As bizarre as it may seem to us today, the promulgation of such ideas for curbing the flow of Finnish immigration was hardly unique to one disgrunted Ontario mining inspector. The temper of the times was such that it gave free rein to every kind of racist and nativist expression. In that regard, Cole's suggestion may not even have been an invention of his own making. It is more likely that he was simply echoing a ploy that had been unsuccessfully tried in the United States by the American government against alleged Finnish socialists shortly after the first great miners' strike of 1907 on the Mesabi Range.

At that time, federal agents stationed in the mining communities of northern Minnesota and Michigan launched a campaign there to harass those Finns who had publicly supported the strike. So, whenever one of them applied for his "second papers," the authorities would withhold the requested documents on the grounds that the applicant—in "being a Finn he is a Mongolian and not a 'white person'" under the laws of the land—was not eligible for American citizenship. However, when one of the unsuccessful applicants took the matter to court in early 1908, the government's case was rejected out of hand. Although admitting that the Finns may have been Mongols in the distant past, the trial judge ruled that their blood had eventually become so diluted with the blood of the Teutonic and other races that they were "now among the whitest people of Europe."[9]

Whether or not it also knew of that ruling, the Department of Immigration and Colonization in Ottawa was not prepared to treat Finns

as being of Asian descent. On the other hand, one of the department's senior officials, F. C. Blair, was sufficiently concerned with the gravity of Cole's other allegations to make further inquiries as to their validity. So, Blair contacted the Finnish consul in Montréal, Akseli K. L. Rauanheimo, for a confirmation or denial of the charges.

Because Consul Rauanheimo wanted to deter the Canadian government from holding views prejudicial to all Finns resident in Canada, he sent this carefully measured reply to Blair:

> Among the thousands of immigrants who at the present time arrive from Finland in Canada there are a great many who desire to become real settlers. The great majority have, however, to work in order to earn and save, because only a few have money sufficiently to enable them to take land and settle.
>
> The consulate has found, especially in the winter time, that it is often difficult to procure work for all. At all times the immigrant has to be willing to accept any work that he can get. Unfortunately the place and nature of the work often is such that it does not take him any nearer to the realization of his original purpose of settling on a farm.
>
> Many Finns are working as bushmen in Ontario and Quebec and their physical strength makes them well suited for the lumber camps. But many s.c. [so-called] "white Finns" avoid to go there, because they are afraid of the Finnish communists, the "reds" who threaten them. We would be glad to know of camps where loyal "white" bushmen could work in peace and safety. If the consulate had connections with the big companies it would try to furnish them with dependable workers. . . .
>
> It would be of great importance if immigrants could get land in the vicinity of lumber camps. Even those without means would dare to settle if they could be confident of being able to earn something during the time when the earth is not yielding anything yet. If he could earn enough during the winter to tide him over the summer when he is tilling the ground, he would soon be independent. This arrangement would be the most practical as far as the Finnish immigrant is concerned.[10]

About the same time, Blair also asked the Finnish consul to comment on other complaints that his department had received concerning the recent influx of radicals from Finland. Always the consummate diplomat, Consul Rauanheimo favoured Blair with a detailed report discounting those allegations:

> But what about the Finns in Canada? I have already mentioned that before 1923 a comparatively great number of the Finnish immigrants

were radicals who had fled from the old country. After 1923 both kinds have come. Taken into consideration that the white elements in Finland greatly outnumber the red elements, it may be said that the percentage of the red arrivals in proportion has been greater. The reason has already been stated: The "whites" were frequently persecuted and the "reds" believed that they could enjoy full freedom in this country.

The fact that the majority of immigrants to Canada in 1923 and 1924 were from Ostrobothnia, a part of Finland that is known for its strong, dependable and white people, tends to prove that most of the new immigrants are white. Their number has increased in recent times as the reds now have been compelled to lower their tone and put an end to their reign of terror.

An undeniable fact is that the reds in Canada are staging a powerful propaganda for their ideas and forcing workers to join their ranks. An immigrant who does not know the language is left to shift for himself. If he is unemployed or with or without reason believes that he has not a fair deal in the place where he is working, he will fall, an easy prey, for an agitator.

This my honest opinion of conditions. In order to become good Canadians in time the Finnish immigrants need some assistance, need that some care be taken of them. They lack at present spiritual and economic guidance in a sad degree, they lack opportunities for learning the language.[11]

The "reign of terror" mentioned in Rauanheimo's report requires further explanation. According to some of my informants, one practice of the local "Red Finns" in Sudbury was to gather at the train station to greet an incoming train known to have "White" newcomers on board. This "reception committee" would then "emphatically invite the White butchers" to continue on their journey and to settle elsewhere. The "Reds" also maintained local and national "investigation committees" to establish the political credentials of new immigrants from Finland. Those who failed the test were shunned by the other members of the local Finnish community in which they lived and were sometimes known to meet with unfortunate "accidents." The "White Finns," in turn, were no less reluctant to use equally sordid tactics when dealing with their rivals from a position of strength.

Such acts of intimidation and terror from members of both factions arose in reaction to the horrendous Finnish Civil War of 1918 (which was always referred to as the Finnish War of Independence in older "White"

historiography). Both "Red" and "White" forces committed excesses of terrifying brutality in the short three-month conflict. If hundreds of Finns died in battle, thousands more perished through summary executions and callous maltreatment in prison camps. To the "White" victors belonged the final acts of vengeance, tales of which so deeply embittered many "Red" sympathizers here that they still could not bear to support Finland during the Finno-Russian Winter War of 1939–40. Indeed, the chief legacy of the civil war in this country was that it left the Finnish-Canadian community more sorely divided than ever before—the effects of which linger to the present day.

The active intervention of "White" Finland's diplomatic representatives in the Finnish-Canadian community's internal affairs throughout the inter-war period also contributed to the widening of those existing splits. Rauanheimo, for example, vigorously used his influence as the first Finnish consul (and later, as consul-general) in Canada to promote the development of new asociations to challenge the primacy of existing "Red" institutions in the community. He promoted the founding of St. Michael's Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of Montreal (Montrealin Pyhän Mikaelin Suomalainen Luterilainen Seurakunta) and the Finnish Immigrant Home (Suomalainen Siirtolaiskoti) for the guidance of Finns living in and around Montréal—or, at least, for those who were not members of the "Red" camp there.

Rauanheimo's hand also appeared in the founding of the ultra-conservative Montreal Finnish National Society in 1930. Indeed, that association of Finnish nationalists finally provided him with the means for implementing the desire that he had expressed years earlier to F. C. Blair: "If the consulate had connections with the big companies it would try to furnish them with dependable workers." The new society's constitution reflected his sentiments in its avowal to be law-abiding, to refuse membership to all Communists, and to find employment for its members.[12] Its ultimate purpose, in fact, was to wage economic warfare against the "Reds" midst the deepening depression by impressing potential employers of Finnish workers with the idea that only its own members were certifiably clean of the taint of Communism. Rauanheimo's grateful Montréal supporters hailed him as the "Father of the

Finns in Canada" for the many services he had rendered to them throughout the years.

The Finnish National Society of Toronto, another association established about the same time as the Montreal Finnish National Society and espousing similar aims, conveyed this message in a form letter that it had printed for distribution to prospective employers (the emphasis as well as grammatical and typographical errors are reproduced here as found in the original text):

> Dear employer:
>
> Lately the unemployment situation has affected the immigrants very severely and also the Finns, and as regarding the latter, erroneous impressions have arisen in great measure that were all so-called Communist, we beg to inform you as follows:
>
> We Finns are not all Communists. The majority of us are law-abiding steady workers. To offset the disastrous propaganda of the Communists, we have founded a organization called "Finnish National Society of Canada" which will have branch societies throughout Canada where Finns are numerous. The purpose of this organization is to unite the Finnish immigrants, to assist them and to educate them to become good citizens of Canada. *No person corrupted by Communism will bear the membership card of this society*, consequently this society will guarantee that its members are reliable, low-abiding workers. For your benefit we have opened an office which will distribute workers to those requiring such. This office will seek work only for its members.
>
> We hope and trust that you will accept this movement with pleasure for it will assist you in obtaining absolutely reliable workers from among our members. For your convenience we are enclosing cards which, by filling in, will constitute your order for workers.
>
> Always at your service, we are,
>
> Finnish National Society of Canada[13]

The aims and membership of the two societies were quickly subsumed by the Central Organization of Loyal Finns in Canada (COLFC), an association that was founded on 22 February 1931 and whose first honorary member—not at all coincidentally—turned out to be none other than Consul-General Rauanheimo. The COLFC was now charged with the task of extending their crusade against the "Reds" to the rest of the Finnish-Canadian community beyond the confines of Montréal and Toronto. To it was also entrusted the added responsibility for eliciting

further support for the "White" cause from business leaders, government officials and other influential persons in the Canadian mainstream across the country.

So, one of the COLFC's first priorities was the publication of an English-language bulletin in 1931 to communicate this to the Canadian élite:

> We have to admit with regret that many of the Finnish immigrants too have become besmitten by bolshevist or communist propaganda are giving their support to these enemies of the country and government. They have created an impression that all of the immigrants of Finnish nationality are in sympathy with active workers for the realization of communistic ideals. Justly or not . . . [this] has caused our Finnish countrymen in Canada many hardships and sufferings which other nationalities have been spared as a whole. It is therefore, that we, the nationally minded element among the Finns in Canada, who are loyal to our adopted country and support its laws and institutions, have taken up the fight with a view of putting an end to further bolshevist propaganda and activity among our countrymen, our aim also being to clear our nationality as a whole from suspicion of being all the foes of humanity.[14]

The actual targets of the COLFC's enmity were the members of the Finnish Organization of Canada (FOC), an association originally established under the name of the Finnish Socialist Organization of Canada (FSOC) in 1911. The FOC's proud boast was that it had served as the one and only national association of Finns in Canada from its inception as the FSOC to the founding of the COLFC. Because the COLFC failed to attract more than a fraction of the support that it enjoyed, the FOC still could claim to be the largest organization of Finnish people in the country until the Canadian government temporarily suppressed it together with a number of other alleged pro-Communist organizations under the War Measures Act in 1940.

Perhaps the main reason for FOC's continuing popularity with a significant part of the Finnish community throughout the 1930s stemmed from the wide range of cultural, social, educational programmes and services that it offered its constituency. According to the FOC's own letters patent and constitution, its primary "purposes and objects" were:

> (a) To assimilate the Finnish-speaking people of Canada with the native population by instilling in the minds the benefits of Canadian citizenship, by the teaching of the English language, by disseminating true

information about the laws, customs, traditions, history and current events in Canada, and by a lawful and intelligent use of the rights and duties of Canadian citizenship;

(b) To advance the standard of life of the Finnish-speaking people of Canada by encouraging and developing co-operative enterprises tending to secure their material interests;

(c) To develop the mental faculties of the Finnish-speaking people of Canada by the holding of educational lectures, by furthering artistic endeavours such as singing, music, theatricals, gymnastics, and by maintaining libraries and reading rooms;

(d) To own such buildings and other properties and to carry on such business as are necessary for the efficient execution of these activities, and in particular, (1) To publish a newspaper and other publications; (2) To maintain book stores, ticket offices and other agencies for the convenience of its members;

(e) To organize and issue charters to local bodies throughout Canada for the same purpose.[15]

Of course, not everyone accepted the FOC's constitution at face value. One federal government official, W. P. J. O'Meara, already had serious misgivings about the organization's mission at the time of the FSOC's re-incorporation under the name of the "Finnish Organization of Canada" in 1923. He informed Lee, O'Donoghue and Harkins, the law firm then representing the FOC, that four of the seven members on the FOC's provisional executive committee belonged to the

> Executive of the Finnish Section of the Workers' Party of Canada, that is, [each of the four was found] to be an avowed and active communist, definitely disloyal to the institutions of this country. The opinion has also been advanced that the purpose of the application for incorporation is to forward the conspiracy against Constitutional Government and the present system of society in Canada.[16]

Certainly the FOC did not hide its left-wing sympathies. In its view, Canadian society was divided into two distinct classes—the capitalist minority and the exploited working-class majority to which most Finnish Canadians belonged. Thus, even as it carried out its self-proclaimed mission as the *"seura-, valistus- ja kulttuurielämän ahjo"* or forge in the development of the social, educational cultural life of the Finnish-Canadian community,[17] it larded its many multi-faceted activities with a heavy coating of socialist rhetoric, ideals and aspirations.

Whether or not the FOC operated as an obedient tool of the Communist Party of Canada (as was claimed by its enemies), there is no denying the extent of its organizational and cultural accomplishments. The FOC's archivist, Hannes Sula, outlined some of those achievements on the occasion of its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1936 (which it traditionally dated from the founding of the FSOC in 1911):

> It [the FOC] demonstrates that the revolutionary working people's movement is not the enemy of national culture and enlightenment, but rather their friend.
>
> Its present situation shows that the Finnish Organization of Canada is the leading and overwhelmingly the largest educational and cultural organization of the Finnish-language working people in Canada. . . .
>
> We can proudly point to the following results of our work:
>
> About 75 locals [or branches] of our organization are active now, more than ever before.
>
> All of them have their own operational centres—forming together a common forge of enlightenment and a cradle of social life for the Finnish-language working people.
>
> About 50 of these locals retain full control of their own quarters.
>
> Hundreds of plays are presented by us every year.
>
> In our libraries are thousands of works and more are being continually added.
>
> *Vapaus*—the only Finnish-language daily in Canada—brings knowledge and light into thousands of homes in the cities and forest fringes, leading the struggle and operations on behalf of those oppressed and exploited and in defence of their rights—against capitalism and in defence of socialism.[18]

Yet the 1930s also saw the emergence of a growing number of Finns who had wearied of the vicious, unending conflict between the "Red" and "White" camps. A few brave souls even tried to effect a reconciliation between the two. Unfortunately, such efforts usually led to nought—as happened in the case of one Finnish pastor, a Rev. Kuitunen, who recounted this unhappy experience to Dr. Tappert, a colleague of his:

> Before and during Christmas I was canvassing the field, trying to collect the unpaid membership fees and distribute the envelopes. And naturally, when I met the red Finns I invite [*sic*] them to Church and tried to make the church interesting to them and show that our church is not

> a church of certain political colour but the Church of Jesus Christ. This was bad in the eyes of the Nationalisticals [*sic*].[19]

Others were so distressed by the internal dissension and the consequences it was having on their livelihood and interrelations with the rest of Canadian society that they began to downplay their ethnic identity and drift away from the community. What most moderate Finns really wanted was just to be able to distance themselves from the extremism of both "Red" and "White" camps, but their appreciation of the Canadian public's special fear and dislike of radicals—especially those of foreign birth or descent—forced them to consider "de-politicizing" and "de-ethnicizing" their Finnish identity too. One moderate, Charles M. Haapanen, indicated just how far some non-radical Finns were prepared to go during the 1930s in that regard so they could to free the Finnish-Canadian co-operative movement from "Red" control:

> Any co-operative store . . . can not be under the control of any group or nationality, even less under a political party, but only should be controlled by its membership regardless of colour, race, religion or worldview.[20]

The outbreak of the Winter War finally put a halt to the corrosive process of de-ethnicization that was slowly gnawing away at and marginalizing the ethnic identity of the non-radical elements—especially that of the second-generation youth—in the Finnish-Canadian community. The Soviet Union's attack upon Finland on November 30th, 1939, and the heroic resistance put up by the Finnish forces against the Soviet juggernaut raised an immense outpouring of sympathy from everyone in community (with the exception of the "Reds") for their ancestral homeland and, as well, renewed in them an irrepressible pride in their Finnish identity. The Canadian public's admiration and overwhelming support of Finland also served to eliminate many of the historic prejudices that it previously harboured against Finnish Canadians *per se*. From 1941 onward (that is, after Finland joined Germany in attacking the Soviet Union) to the present, all the non-radical elements in the Finnish community have insisted that their communal institutions and associations operate as non-political or apolitical entities *vis-à-vis* the body politic in Canada. Perhaps that also explains why so few non-radical Finnish Canadians have entered politics and, indeed, only one—Judy Erola—has ever held a cabinet post in the federal government.

The coming of World War II also brought with it other significant changes in Canada's treatment of its ethnocultural minorities. Because the war had created great fear and suspicion in the public mind concerning the loyalty of the "foreign" elements resident here, the Canadian government sometimes responded too hastily and without reasonable cause against perceived threats from so-called "enemy-aliens" and other non-mainstream individuals and groups. On the other hand, it also called upon all Canadians, even those who were of "foreign" extraction or naturalized, to join in a common national enterprise—the Canadian war effort. Wartime labour shortages also compelled private industry to recruit women, including those from the immigrant communities, to work in fields not traditionally given to female employment. The spread of "ethnic" Canadians into the mainstream after the war was further encouraged by the preferential treatment accorded to all Canadian war veterans—regardless of ethnic origin—when seeking government employment.

Once schooled in the ideals of democracy and equality, the Canadian-raised offspring from immigrant families aspired for more than the second-class status and treatment that had been the lot of their parents. Moreover, the great tide of post-war immigrants and refugees from Europe—a better educated and more articulate group than their predecessors of earlier years—reinforced the ranks of those demanding a restructuring of Canada's societal values. By the 1970s, the combined forces of old and new "ethnic" Canadians succeeded in persuading the federal government to introduce a new policy of multiculturalism that recognized them as full and equal partners in Canadian society and affirmed their right to decide for themselves whatever part, if any, of their ethnic heritage, affiliations and identities that they might choose to retain. So, it does seem somewhat ironic that, in this age of official multiculturalism, Mrs. Sillanpää's *Under the Northern Lights* should now be chronicling not only the bygone era of a once-thriving ethnocultural community, but also that community's current decline.

Mrs. Sillanpää was very much a witness to the forces and events that shaped the ethnic community and country to which she belonged. By the late 1920s and the early 1930s—precisely the time when she was entering into young womanhood—some of those forces had already led

to a momentous transformation in the contours of the Finnish-Canadian community. Most notable were the doubling of the community's size (from 21,494 in 1921 to 43,885 in 1931[21]) and the redefinition of its political landscape that stemmed from the great wave of Finnish immigration in the 1920s. From the immigrant ghettos of Montréal and Toronto, the rivulets of a new spirit of Finnish cultural identity spread out across the land—even to the lumber camps and mining towns in the outer reaches of Northern Ontario where Mrs. Sillanpää spent her early years as a young immigrant child.

After the death of her father and her mother's subsequent remarriage, Mrs. Sillanpää became increasingly involved in various activities associated with the Consumers Co-operative Society, Limited. It was the central institution to emerge from that new cultural identity in Timmins. As a teenager, she was irresistibly drawn into the cultural activities and associations that it sponsored through her deep and abiding interest in sports and drama. She also found employment with the Consumers Co-op while the country was still reeling from the effects of the Great Depression. Although she eventually accepted a better-paying job elsewhere, the co-op had provided her with invaluable training and work experience. Even then, she continued to participate in and to benefit from the cultural activities that it supported.

In the politically fragmented milieu of the Finnish-Canadian community of the times, the act of working at the co-op or participating in any of its cultural activities would have usually brought an end to all links with the radical faction—whether those ties might have been with the FOC itself, or an affiliated athletic club, co-op or drama society. Normally it would not even have been possible to maintain cordial relations with any of the other faction's members—much less friendships! Yet, as is mentioned in *Under the Northern Lights*, Mrs. Sillanpää managed to transcend some of the Finnish community's internal barriers and taboos, that is, in having and keeping friends on both sides of the political fence. It is perhaps a testament to her own innate *sisu* ("guts" or fortitude) that she even dared to trifle with such sternly held conventions.

Mrs. Sillanpää was also quick to cross the many boundaries separating the membership of the Finnish community from the Canadian

mainstream. Hers was an achievement that eluded most Finnish immigrants—especially those who could only speak English with difficulty. Although such accomplishment may not seem to be earth-shattering under the kinder circumstances pertaining to present-day Canada, I should hasten to add that the immigrant's lot is rarely an easy one. It usually requires an initial investment of considerable effort and perseverance on the part of most newcomers to persuade their host society to take them seriously and to accept them as the equals of its charter members. Indeed, Mrs. Sillanpää's reminiscences of her life "under the Northern Lights" documents exactly what and how much was required of her to become a full-fledged member of Canadian society.

During World War II, Mrs. Sillanpää worked at a parachute-manufacturing plant in aid of Canada's war effort. After the war, she married her beau, a Canadian of Finnish origin and a five-year veteran of the Canadian Army freshly returned from the battlefields of Europe. She spent the next year with him in Yellowknife saving up a "stake" for their future life together. They then moved to Timmins to raise a family. When her husband was transferred by the Post Office Department to Elliot Lake, she and their two sons went with him. As a gym teacher in the local school system there, she was able to pass on to children of many other ethnocultural origins the lessons learned during her years as a gymnast and gymnastics instructor with the Revontulet/Northern Lights Athletic Club of Timmins. Even after her husband died, she has remained active in the local community. For her services to the Kidney Foundation, Mrs. Sillanpää was twice recognized (in 1990 and 1994) as Volunteer of the Year for Northeastern Ontario.

As the editor of this volume in the Museum's Mercury Series, I feel most privileged to have made Mrs. Sillanpää's acquaintance and to have been able to assist her with the publication of her autobiography. She is a really remarkable lady, and her story is well worth the telling. I hope that you will find *Under the Northern Lights* as enchanting, enlightening and entertaining as I have. *Hyvää jatkoa*—enjoy!

EDWARD W. LAINE

NOTES

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Under Secretary of State to Lee, O'Donoghue and Harkins, 8 September 1923.

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THE JOHNSON FAMILY, 1918
Leonard and Tilda Johnson with daughter Nelma at three months of age.

1

My Family's Journey from Finland to America

I was born—at 7 o'clock in the evening on October 31st, 1917, in Warren, Ohio. It was Hallowe'en night—and so, I came out with the witches. My mother [Tilda Johnson] later told me that I was a homely baby with thin black hair. She also said that she hadn't really cared how homely I had been so long as she was able to keep me. She had already lost two babies before I was born. They were: my brother Karl Lennard, at three months of age, and my sister Ilmi, after just a few weeks. I was a very welcome baby.

Both of my parents were born in Finland, and only came over to America when in their late teens. They had first met in Warren, where they were married on January 25th, 1914.

My father [Leonard Johnson] came from Kotka, a southern Finnish city on the Gulf of Finland. He was actually born in Jumalniemi, a suburb of Kotka. It was a small village centred around a sawmill on the Kymi River. His father worked in the sawmill. His children—all seven of them, including my father—went to a little public school in the village.

My father later became a member of the Kotkan Karhu [Bear of Kotka] Athletic Club. He became an amateur wrestler, but was also active in gymnastics and other sports. He was, for example, exceptional-

THE JOHNSON FAMILY, JANUARY 1919
Leonard and Tilda Johnson with daughter Nelma at two years of age.

ly good on the high bar for his day. In the United States, he held odd jobs between training sessions and sports events. He coached at local Finnish sports clubs, many of which he himself had helped to organize. He also

worked in the steel mills in the Warren area. In Canada, my father mostly worked in the lumber camps.

My mother was born in Ylistaro in the province of Vaasa, which is on the north-western side of Finland. She was from a family of ten children, several of whom had died as infants. Her father died when she was only three years old. Life then became extremely hard for her widowed mother.

Finland

There were no social benefits of any kind at that time to assist widows like her. My mother worked from the time that she was eleven years old. Her first job was at a large nearby farm. In her early teens, Mother apprenticed in a bakery. She loved the work there.

School in Finland at that time was not compulsory. Her family was very poor and did not have the shoes and warm clothing that she needed. Confirmation classes were held for all children in their early teens, and their attendance was compulsory.* Mother later told me that she loved her classes. She always regretted the fact that she couldn't go to school and was forced to miss so much learning.

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* EDITOR'S NOTE: Public school attendance was not made compulsory in Finland until after it obtained its independence from Russia in 1917. However, a basic level of literacy was achieved throughout the country thanks to the fact that all Finnish children were compelled to attend confirmation classes. It was the tenet of the state church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, that all Christians should be able to read the Bible. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, elevated levels of literacy occurred in the general population wherever Lutheranism was the dominant religion, as was the case in Finland and the Scandinavian countries of Sweden, Norway and Denmark. By way of contrast, the general population in Canada had a much lower level of literacy until compulsory schooling was introduced across the country.

She had wanted to learn so much that she used a burnt stick to write her letters with the Bible as her guide. The Bible was the only book she had at home. The births and deaths in the family were written onto its back pages. Mother read the Bible many times from beginning to end. All her life, Mother read everything she could get her hands on. She was almost entirely self-educated.

Life was very difficult in Finland at the turn of the century. So, Mother left to join her older sister Hilma, who had migrated to the United States a few years earlier. Hilma had sent her the ticket money. Mother worked at odd jobs—first, as a maid in a hotel, and then at anything else she could get—until she was hired as housekeeper for a wealthy family. It was then that she learned to cook. Her wages were three dollars per week, together with board and a lovely room. For her, this was luxury.

One dollar of Mother's "huge" wage was used for paying back her sister the cost of her ticket for coming to America.* Another dollar was sent to her mother in Finland. The third dollar she used for her own expenses. The family Mother worked for was so good to her that the lady of the house even allowed her to use the sewing-machine. Mother then made most of her own clothes.

Once she had repaid her debt to her sister, Mother started to save for a ticket for John, her beloved younger brother. She was quite worried about him because he wasn't very strong. He found labouring on a farm in Finland very hard and the food too unsuitable for his delicate stomach. Mother was very close to her brother. She was so happy when John eventually arrived at Hilma's place.

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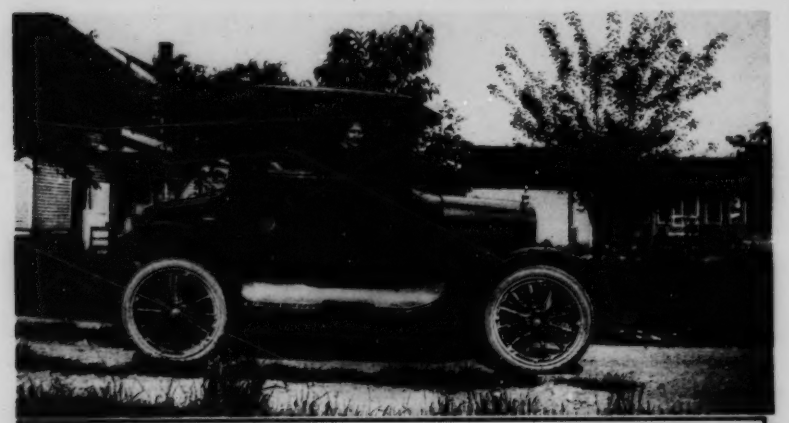
* EDITOR'S NOTE: The phenomenon of "chain migration"—that is, the encouragement and assistance of friends and relatives to immigrate into a new country by those compatriots and family already settled there—appears to have been an extremely important factor in drawing so many Finns to the United States and Canada. Its effect was most noticeable in western Finland where, in certain districts, more than a quarter of the local population emigrated to "Amerikka" between about the turn of the century and World War I.



AUNT SAIMA, 1926
Nelma's Aunt Saima driving the new car that she and Uncle John had bought.

John later proved to be a wonderful uncle to me. I remember him with much affection and appreciation for all the kind and thoughtful things he did for me and Mother. He roomed at our place most of the time. He always had a car, the very latest in style, and he changed it often. He married a lovely girl, Saima, but they had no children. So, I was always Uncle John's little girl.

Mother met Father for the first time while he was participating in a wrestling match. She was disgusted by the spectacle. Wrestling was not her favourite sport.

One night she was at a concert. There, after the regular programme was over, the master of ceremonies asked if anyone in the audience had an additional act to offer. Two friends of Father's pushed him onto the stage to sing. Mother thought: "There's that man again and he even has a tear in the knee of his pants."

My father had a very good voice and knew so many songs. He sang one song after another—all without accompaniment, of course. The audience would not let him off the stage because he had such a fine sense of humour and proved so expressive in his rendition of those songs. All this impressed Mother.

2

Our First Years in Canada, 1921–23

We moved to Canada when I was four years old. We spent a few weeks in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. Then Father took us to a lumber camp for the winter. It was somewhere in the Algoma District.

Many families lived in the bush cutting pulpwood. There they sawed and felled trees. They chopped off the branches, sawed the trunks into logs of a required length and piled them up in cords. Sometimes the women helped, working side by side with their husbands. A scaler came in the spring to measure the cords of logs and to credit each man for his labours.

Everyone worked for himself. It was tough work that lasted from early morning until evening—all through daylight hours. Yet it was a living, especially when decent jobs were hard to find.

Our expenses were minimal in the bush. We brought in our basic foods and coal-oil for the lamps. My parents hauled in the food from the headquarters camp themselves. Wood for the camp's stoves was taken from the forest. Of course, we had free housing—such as it was!

The women would sew huge patches on the new mackinaw pants for the men so that their pants could last longer that way. All our clothes had to be worn-out before new ones were bought.

QUEEN OF THE CASTLE, 1922
Leonard and Tilda Johnson with daughter Nelma, now at four years of age, playing on the roof of their tiny cabin at one of the many lumber camps situated in the Algoma District of Ontario.

We lived for a while with another family, Urho and Maija Kataja. They had a son, Jorma. He was about my age, and so I had a playmate.

Meanwhile Dad was busy building our own camp close to theirs. It was a tiny log cabin with one window. Mother helped to insulate the cabin. She did this by pushing and pounding moss between the logs to keep out draughts. The stove, which was used both for cooking and heating, had been ordered. So, the men hauled it home by sleigh from the headquarters camp.

Dad built the double-bed, table and benches. Although roughly made, they served their purpose. He made shelves for food, pans and dishes. Our trunk became a bedside table. Large nails driven high into wall and an overhead shelf were used for hanging and storing our clothes.

It was a tiny, but warm and cosy, cabin. Dad always joked that it was so small that we had to go outside to turn around.

THE SILLANPÄÄ FAMILY, 1921
Hilda Sillanpää with her children. In front (left to right) are Aino, Paul and Walter. In back are Bill and Veikko. Paul was later to become Nelma's husband.

We shared a sauna with our neighbours.* The men had built it together. It was a real old-fashioned Finnish sauna. It was built out of logs and boasted a fireplace made of stones. It had no windows—just a small opening near the ceiling for the air, and a flap to close it. We always took a candle or a lantern when we went in. The benches were made from logs split in half and roughly hewn. We all had to sit very carefully upon them so we wouldn't get splinters in our behinds.

* EDITOR'S NOTE: Perhaps there is no other element more evocative of the Finnish culture and lifestyle than the sauna, that is, the Finnish-type of steam-bath. Indeed, it has been said of Finnish homesteaders, whether in this country, in the United States or in Finland itself, that the first structure they erected was a sauna, and only thereafter a house, barn and other outbuildings. Local social organizations, companies and individual business men in the various Finnish communities built and operated public saunas as viable commercial enterprises for those Finns unable to have their own private sauna at home.

The women washed clothes at the sauna too. A large barrel, which the men filled up, provided the water for laundering. Because we were near a fast-running, spring-fed brook, good water was plentiful.

On the other side of the brook was a mountain densely covered with trees. Although we children were often warned not to cross over the brook, the thick bush and the wild animals were enough to frighten us into obeying. It was a wild and naturally beautiful place.

My parents played a lot of cards, especially pinochle, and they taught the others to play. Many evenings were spent in playing cards, story-telling and singing.

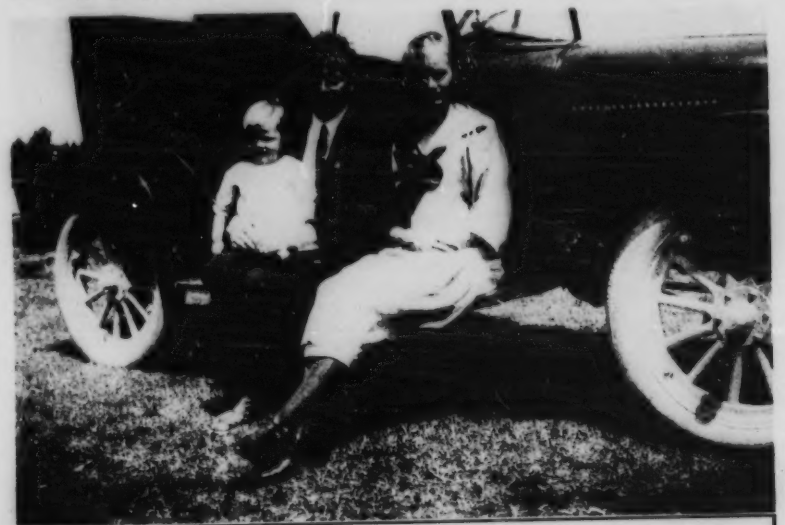
My father also played the accordion and the mandolin, and almost always had a small accordion with him wherever he went. Urho Kataja had a good base voice. The Kataja family also had two boarders, Ilmari Kuusivirta and Leo Kauppi. Leo was a very good singer. In later years he made many records. I still have a few of them.

Many of our evenings were filled with sheer enjoyment when the three of them sang separately and together. We children would fall asleep listening to them. Leo was a young man with a girl-friend in Finland, and for whom he was very lonely. Often he would tell stories and sing songs until everyone was asleep.

At the end of October, I celebrated my fifth birthday. Mother had managed to save me a chocolate bar and she gave it to me on the morning of my birthday. I was thrilled with my present because candy was a rare treat at the camp. Dad, who had drawn a picture for me, told me the story that went with it that evening. He made a lot of drawings for me, and always had a story to go with them. I treasured them very much.

On Christmas Eve, we walked a few miles to the headquarters camp where many men were working. They had a large dining-room there. In it, the table was laden with cakes, cookies and coffee-bread. They also had a Christmas tree. We had a great time with the other children there. Each of us received a candy cane. That evening was also rich with songs, stories, music and laughter. What a wonderful talent those three men—Father, Urho and Leo—had! They provided the entertainment, giving everyone a most memorable concert.

On one lovely Sunday in the early spring, we walked some distance to another camp. My mother told me that there I would see a bride. George Westerholm had married a newly arrived girl from Finland whose name was Selma. After their wedding in Sault Ste. Marie, he brought her to his little cabin in the bush. She was a tall, slim girl, who had large grey eyes and long golden hair bound up into two braids. Each



THE WESTERHOLM FAMILY, 1925
George and Selma Westerholm with their daughter Ruth and their new car.

braid was twisted into a circle on both sides of her head. I thought she was lovely. I whispered to my mother that she did look like a bride. I had never seen a bride before. Many years later, their daughter Ruth was my bridesmaid when I got married.

One day I became very curious about the activities of the men. They were behaving in a most secretive manner, talking in low voices and telling Jorma and me to scram whenever they found us listening. At the time, I was only five years old and very inquisitive. The men then disappeared into the woods. It was early spring and they had a fire going. They were cooking something in a large pot. I snuck up close and watched. Then I ran back to Mother to ask her: "What are they frying?" She told me to go out and play, but to keep away from the men in the

woods. She seemed so angry about something that I felt that I had to obey.

I found out that night that the men were making booze. They began sampling it immediately. They first became rip-roaring drunk—and then extremely ill. It had been a long winter with nothing for them to drink except for coffee and home-made beer called *kaljaa*. *Kaljaa* was made from those ingredients that we had on hand: sugar, molasses, yeast and lukewarm water. A mixture of these ingredients was allowed to stand overnight before being poured into containers. The resulting brew was then ready to drink.

The men thought that they should celebrate the coming of spring by making a batch of home brew. Because they were not very successful moonshiners, this was their one and only effort to distil home-made liquor. They were all a sad bunch the next day. Their hangovers were bad, and their queasy stomachs—worse! In fact, it took them days to recover. Dad said that he was surprised to find that none of them had died—and even admitted that it was the stupidest thing that he had ever done.

I eagerly waited for Dad to wake up the next morning so that I could tell him everything that had happened. He said my eyes were like saucers as I told him about the singing, yelling and retching. I described how everybody had been falling all over the place, and what a time Mother had in trying to get Dad into our cabin.

Mr. Kataja, a big man about six-foot tall, had fallen over the doorstep trying to get into his cabin. No one was able to lift him inside. It took us ages just to drag him into the cabin, where he was then left to sleep on the floor. Another man slept in the sauna. Still another had peed by the wood pile, and he hadn't even held onto his "thing" while doing so. After that, he had simply fallen there in his stupor.

My parents were horrified at how much I had seen and was able to relate to them. What a horrible effect the raw home brew had had on the men!

In late spring, the scalers came. They measured all of the piles of logs and gave the men their credit slips. These were turned in at the office. On the way out, the men were paid for a winter's hard work.

In June, we travelled by train to another camp still within the beautiful Algoma District. We disembarked near a pile of logs that was marked with a pole showing a mileage number on it. There were many abandoned lumber camps in the area, and anyone could live in them free of charge during the summer months [when they were not being used by the logging company's workers]. We were two families, but I cannot remember who the others were.

THE JOHNSON FAMILY, 1923
Leonard and Tilda Johnson with daughter Nelma and her doll, Bruce Mines, Ontario.

We all carried our own luggage. I carried my doll. We started walking. There was some kind of a path to follow, and one of us knew the way. The rest of the luggage, the dry foods and cases of canned foods were left on top of the piles of logs. The men made many trips back and forth to carry everything to our destination. I got tired, and Dad carried me on his shoulders.

It seemed to me to be a long way before we were able to reach a lovely lake. We almost circled it before the men found the two cabins that they were looking for. We took the cook camp because it was smaller than the other. The other family took the men's bunkhouse. The camps were beside a small stream that flowed down a hill to the lake. Across the stream was a sauna.

It wasn't long before the men and women had the cabins in a liveable condition. The next day the women scrubbed the sauna clean while the men cut the wood and got the stone fireplace going. That night a sauna was enjoyed by all.

The furniture was handmade and roughly hewn. It had been left there by the lumber company. Everyone gathered spruce branches from nearby trees for mattresses. These branches were then covered with blankets. Such beds were not too comfortable, but we got used to them.

Both camps had old wood-stoves for heating and cooking. I always marvelled at my mother. How she could bake bread in all kinds of ovens!

Every evening we had a big bonfire outside although the flies were very bad. We all gathered around the fire, and talked and sang to pass the evenings.

We saw many bears, but they didn't come any closer than the back of the sauna. Old garbage had been left there, and it attracted bears. I was scared. Our men buried our garbage deep into the ground farther away from the camp.

The lake was gorgeous. Its waters were very deep and clear. In many places we could see its sandy bottom. All around the lake and up into the hills were camps with people living in them like us. All of us were waiting for fall and the lumber camps to start again. The fishing was good. An old row-boat had been left on the shore, which the men repaired and used. Dad loved to fish, and so he was happy.

Fish was our main food. It was fried, baked, smoked, or made into a soup or fish stew, which the Finns in Canada call *kala mojakkaa*. This is comparable to fish chowder and very good. Mother was an expert on fish dishes. We had cases of canned milk so that the chowder was nourishing. She also invented a pie made from molasses similar to a butter-tart recipe. It was delicious and satisfied my sweet tooth anyway.

We would go rowing on the lake in the early evening. There Dad would play his accordion and sing. His voice would echo—and you could hear him for miles. The people on shore would shout for more and bang on dish pans to show their appreciation. We had no luxuries, but we were happy. Dad was so much fun to be with. We never met any of the people living around the lake, but we knew they were mostly Finns.

We spent the next fall and winter at another camp. It was also beside a lovely lake in the Algoma District. At the headquarters camp, sections of land and forest were allotted to different men to work. Dad took over a section, and then hired four men to help him cut pulpwood.

We stayed at the headquarters camp until Dad and the men had built a cabin. This cabin was divided into two sections and with doors at both ends. We lived in the cooking and dining section, and the men stayed in the other.

As soon as we moved in, the men built a sauna. It stood near the edge of a cliff facing the lake. It had a small, rough porch for us to sit and dry ourselves on and enjoy the scenery. As far as we knew, this lake had no name. So, Dad named it Beaver Lake in honour of the beavers we could see working away on a small island in the narrow bay. I never did find out how far that bay went, or whether it joined another lake or river.

I went as far as the next camp to play with two children there. I would walk about a mile, keeping near the edge of the lake for direction. I never got lost and saw only small animals along the way. One day I stood motionless as a lovely skunk family crossed my path. I knew that farther on there was an Indian camping-ground, but didn't dare go that far.

I saw Indians fishing on the lake in their canoes. In the winter, they drove on the ice of the lake in their dog-sleighs. A lovely Indian girl often went by our camp in her dog-sleigh. She would give me a ride to and fro to the headquarters camp at the other end of the lake for supplies. How I loved to do that!

As was the case with most of the children there, I had been enrolled in a correspondence school. I had my lessons to do every day.

3

Life at Bruce Mines, 1923–26

In 1923, we moved to Bruce Mines. It was a small farming community on the North Channel of Lake Huron. Bruce Mines was named after Lord James Bruce Elgin. Once there had been the first commercially successful copper-mine in Canada. It had operated from 1847 to 1876, when it was closed. All that was left were deep, uncovered holes, the remains of a few old buildings and a rotten pier jutting out into the lake.

We lived in a house that was purchased by the Finnish people there to be used as their Finnish *haali*, or hall.* Because they could not afford to pay for a caretaker, they asked my parents to live there and look after the place. In payment, we would have free rent and the farmers would supply wood to heat the place. It was a cold house with only the cook-stove in the kitchen for heat. The chimney went up

* EDITOR'S NOTE: The early Finnish immigrants in both Canada and the United States demonstrated a particular willingness to organize themselves into church congregations, temperance and secular cultural societies—and especially the latter. With those societies came their cultural centres, the *haalit* or halls, which the Finns either built themselves or rented. It was there that dances were held, dramas staged, orchestras and choirs practised, and athletes and gymnasts performed. The *haali* frequently became the focus of the Finnish community's social and political life, providing a refuge or sanctuary for its members where they could freely celebrate their Finnishness.

through our bedroom above so that we had a bit of heat in the one bedroom. The other two bedrooms were icy.

A Picnic at the Old Finn Hall, Bruce Mines, Ontario, 1923
Much of the social life of the local Finnish community in Bruce Mines centred about the Old Finn Hall.

I started school in September of that year at Bruce Mines Public School. There was no high school then, but the first two grades of high school were taught in the same public school. That was as far as anyone could go to school in that town. It was a long walk to school, and so we had to take our lunches with us. I carried a little, red shortening-pail, which had a lid and handle, for holding my lunch.

One spring day I left without my mother noticing what I was wearing. I had been given a "ratty" fur piece to play with—and I loved it! I wore it twisted around my neck and hanging down to my ankles. I also reeked of vanilla. Because I loved the smell of vanilla, I had almost emptied my mother's precious bottle of vanilla all over me. The teacher gave me many amused glances, but left me alone. She probably didn't like the smell of vanilla. My mother was horrified by my outfit—and by the smell that arose from it when I arrived home from school.

One Christmas our class had to sing at our annual concert. I wanted a new dress for the occasion. No money! Mother had a warm winter coat with a beautiful silk lining. She carefully ripped out the lining

so that she could get enough material for a little dress. My wonderful mother did so much with so little. Kirsti Kauhala, our neighbour, had a sewing-machine, and she helped Mother with the sewing. She was a whiz at making clothing out of anything that was given to her. Her children were always warmly dressed.

Mother told me that there was no Santa Claus. She said that he was just the Spirit of Christmas, and that it was really the parents who bought the gifts. She had to tell me the sad truth because she had no money to buy anything for me. Still a child is but a child—and a part of me thought that she could be wrong. So, on Christmas Eve, I hung up my stocking right on the chimney going through the bedroom anyway. There was nothing in it the next morning. When I was older she told me that, had she seen the stocking on that Christmas Eve, she would have asked the neighbours at least for some candy to put into it. Mother always told the truth.

NELMA JOHNSON, 1926
"So, on Christmas Eve, I hung up my stocking right on the chimney...."

Mother and I were often left alone to ourselves while Dad went off to work at lumber camps. One particular day when we went to the post office—which was then operated by the Prout sisters—there was a letter for me from Father. Enclosed was a dollar bill! A whole dollar—all to myself—what a wonderful gift! The next day I walked to Jackson's Grocery Store and bought a large bag

of apples. When I got home I excitedly told my mother, "Look at all these apples—and I still have three quarters left!"

Times were poor, and we had no treats. Our food was simple, but I can never remember going hungry. Mother could do many things with potatoes—whether baked, fried, scalloped, or as a dish called creamed potatoes, which was flavoured with onions. We always had cocoa and coffee with a lot of milk in it.

A SUNDAY GATHERING IN BRUCE MINES, ONTARIO, 1924
The hard-working Finns treasured Sundays—their only day of rest—as a time for participating in communal activities.

Mother made rye and whole-wheat breads, as well as a Finnish coffee-bread called *pulla*. The latter was served in many ways. Warm from the oven was the best! She would even make *korppua*, or husks, out of old *pulla* loaves. She did this by cutting thick slices of *pulla* lengthwise in half, sprinkling them on top with sugar and cinnamon and baking them dry in a slow oven. The resulting *korppua* were crispy and delicious, especially when dunked into hot cocoa or coffee. Many an evening was spent in savouring *leipämaitoa*. This dish, which can be translated into English as milk bread, was made of sliced coffee-bread that was placed in a bowl and then sprinkled over with sugar and drowned in hot milk.

Father was a good fisherman, and so we had fresh fish whenever he was home. A farmer by the name of Vic Saari often brought wood, vegetables and freshly killed meat, and did us many other kind deeds. The Saaris lived on a farm a few miles away on the shore of a lovely bay of Lake Huron. They had five children: Impi, Arvo, Helen, Aino and Bill. Impi was the youngest and about my age. We became good friends—and that friendship has continued to this day!

Our closest neighbours were Kirsti and Lauri Kauhala. They had a cow, and so we got our fresh milk from them. They had three children:

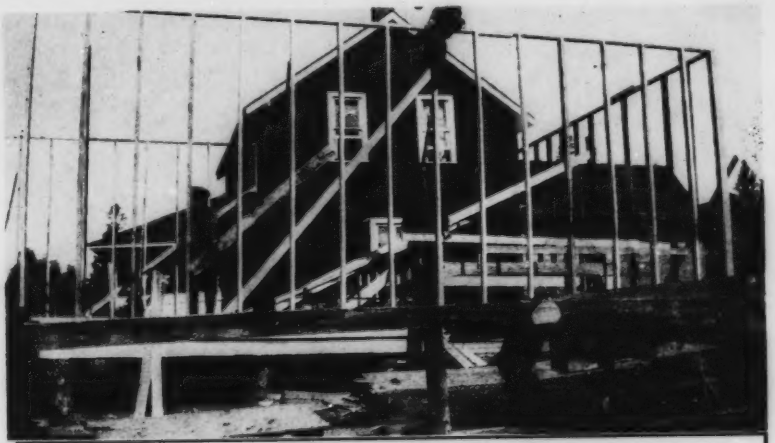
"OLD" PALS, 1924
The Kauhala children—Liisa, Tyyne and Oliver—and Nelma Johnson in Bruce Mines, Ontario.

Oliver, Tyyne and Liisa. We all went to school together, played, picked berries, swam, and had picnics on the sandy beach. Bruce Mines was such a beautiful place in the summer. No wonder that today it is such a popular summer resort area!

Oliver was the oldest, and so he had to watch over us. He pulled me out of the deep, freezing water on one cold winter's day when I ventured too far out on the frozen bay with my sleigh. He carefully went down on his stomach and pushed his sleigh towards me as I bobbed up and down in the icy water. I was able to grab it and he pulled me out. All the while Tyyne screamed and screamed. What a remarkable deed it was

for a nine-year-old boy to remain so calm and know what to do. Mother was horrified when she found out how far out we had gone. We never did find my sleigh. I do remember that I didn't even catch a cold!

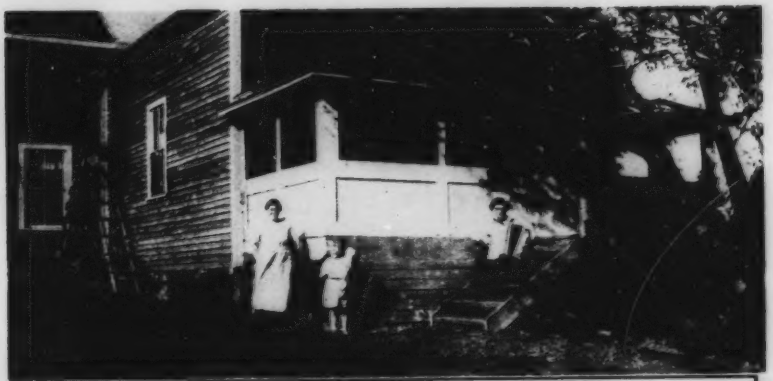
We became lifelong friends with the Saaris and the Kauhalas. When you go through hard times, you never forget the people who have been good to you. The last winter we lived there was a hard one. The kindly owner of Jackson's Grocery gave Mother food on credit. Mother was so happy when she was able to return to Bruce Mines a year later and repay her debt to that kind man.



THE NEW ANNEX TO THE OLD FINN HALL, BRUCE MINES, 1923
Many of the local Finns volunteered a great deal of their time and effort in the building of a new addition to the Old Finn Hall.

One summer the Finnish men built a long extension to the side of the house. It became a recreation hall with a stage and a large screened-in porch facing the lake. Father planned and organized the work. It was completely built by volunteer labour. The farmers' wives would take turns in bringing in the food and helping Mother with the meals for the men. A door was made from our kitchen and dining-room area into the hall. Another door from one of the upstairs bedrooms had steps leading down to the stage. That bedroom was used as a dressing-room for the performers.

Underneath the stage there was nothing but the posts holding it up. I guess they ran out of material. It became a splendid place for hide-and-seek. The prompter for the plays, who sat in the box in front of the stage, had a unique way of getting into it. First she had to go outside and walk to the back of the building, stoop down, go under the stage and get into the box. It was a spooky place. The hall—especially the stage area—was cold and drafty in winter.



THE NEW FINN HALL IN BRUCE MINES, ONTARIO, 1925
With the completion of the annex, the New Finn Hall now boasted a stage and other facilities for the presentation of Finnish-language plays. The actors, of course, were drawn from the membership of the local Finnish community.

It was easy to hold dances and parties because the musician—my father—lived in the building and was always available. I still remember him never missing a beat while standing on chairs and walking around the dance floor as the "polkas" got hectic. He couldn't read a note of music, but he played the accordion as if it were a part of him. He loved music and having a good time. His pay wasn't much. A collection was made at the end of the evening with someone passing the hat around. No one had much money in those days.

I remember my mother reading from a Finnish newspaper about the grand opening of a new Finnish *haali* in Sault Ste. Marie and that Dad was to be on the programme. Dad did not know anything about it. A few days later, he received an invitation and train tickets to go to perform there—all expenses paid! What did he do? He accepted the offer.

He played the accordion and the mandolin, and knew hundreds of songs. His singing of Finnish folk-songs was always very popular. He often made up funny verses to some old tune that was suitable for the occasion. He had a good voice for singing and an excellent memory. He was a talented entertainer.

LEONARD JOHNSON, 1926
"He played the accordion and the mandolin, and knew hundreds of songs."

These were good years. We were poor, but rich in the warm friendships that we enjoyed. Another good memory was that nowhere in Bruce Mines was there a place to buy intoxicating beverages. Everyone had to go to Sault Ste. Marie for that kind of refreshment, and people didn't have money for travelling. So, everyone danced for the pleasure of dancing. We children danced amongst the grownups, and that is how we learned to dance. We learned the waltz, the polka and all the other folk-dances. No one had baby-sitters, and so everyone brought the children along with them. At the end of the evening, there would be a pile of kids sleeping on our beds upstairs.

There was a huge tree in front of the hall. It had heavy branches starting near the bottom—something like an upside down umbrella. Dad built benches around the tree, and small seats between the branches. It was called the Kuherus Puu, or Lovers' Tree. So many pleasant hours were spent in the shade of that tree by children playing games, adults talking and visiting, or lovers cooling off between dances.

I can still remember well the surnames of the many Finnish families living in Bruce Mines at that time: Saari, Kauhala, Johnson,

THE NEW FINN HALL, AUGUST 1938
Arvo Saari, Nelma Johnson, Impi Saari and Tom Hillberg at the New Finn Hall in Bruce Mines, Ontario.

Westerholm, Freeman, Kulha, Sundell, Hill, Koski, Brander, Salo, Harju, Kuusela, Kauppi, Waltonen, Lindqvist, Nevala, Soderna, Joki, Tuomi, Mattson, Kangas and Lampi. I can also recall a bachelor named Grönberg living there.

4

At the Lumber Camps, 1926–28

In 1926, we left Bruce Mines and went to a lumber camp. It was the headquarters camp for a lot of smaller camps in the Cochrane area. That camp was like a small village beside a lake. It consisted of a large cook-house with a huge dining-room, a large bunkhouse and a stable for the horses. The stable-boss also had his room in the stable. There also was a company store, as well as several offices and small houses for the staff. Vic Brander was the general manager, and he had his own house.

Mother became the head cook. She had to do all the cooking and baking for the camp. She also had a girl to wait on tables and to assist her wherever needed. They had a pump for water over one of the sinks for drinking, washing and cooking purposes. A chore boy did the dishes, cut the meat, peeled the vegetables and brought in the wood. During odd times there were only a few men to feed. At other times the tables were full, and the men sitting at them all had to have second servings.

When the "drive" was on (this is when the logs were hauled from the bush), many more men were needed and they, of course, had also to be fed. Breakfast had to be served for a period of several hours, as was lunch. Coffee and buns had to be served at all times because the men would be leaving for the bush at odd hours, starting at 4:00 a.m. It meant exhausting work and long hours for the kitchen staff even though the kitchen itself was well equipped and had electricity. We also found it

hard to get used to the sound of the generator in the basement of the cook camp because our room was just off the kitchen.

One day my mother stopped her work to give me a hug as she heard me say, "Everyone just growls at me!" I was sitting on a stool in the corner of the kitchen—a sad little girl because no one had time to listen to me.

Mr. Brander had the stable-boss drive his sons Ernest and Stanley to school every day. So, all the other children got a ride with them too. We rode a sleigh pulled by two beautiful Shetland ponies. The one-room school was a few miles away, and the lessons there were in French. The teacher, however, was bilingual. We all got along very well, and even managed to learn.

In the spring, Mother was sent for a few weeks to cook at an *uitto kämppä*, or logging camp, away into the bush. The men were pushing the logs into the river and working them downstream. They often had to break up piles of logs jamming up the river. That was dangerous work. The men left in the morning with their lunch, only coming back in the early evening. Mother and I were alone all day.

I played on the bed with my cutouts from a catalogue and stayed around the camp. I was too scared to go far because the clearing was very little—and the bush was so near! I'd listen for the noise of the loggers and watch for the logs floating by on the river. Day by day, the men came closer as they brought the logs downstream. Soon they were close by the camp. It was exciting to watch.

Eventually they got to a certain point down-river and the camp closed. One man was asked to escort my mother and me from the camp. We walked for miles through the bush on old logging trails, stopping only for lunch that Mother had packed for us. It was a tiresome and difficult hike back to the headquarters camp. My mother vowed that she would never again go to a logging camp. It was too tough and lonely for a woman.

Then we went to a summer camp near Hoyle, and that was not a happy time either. Mother had to cook for seventy-five men there. She had a woman helper, a handy man and two chore boys. The water had to be carried by the boys from a spring in the woods. The black flies were

dreadful! We had cheesecloth netting around our beds so that we were able to sleep. It was hot! Our beds were in the corner of the cook camp. My mother worked seven days a week in that heat around a huge wood-burning stove. Even the bread had to be baked there.

IN THE BUSH, ALGOMA DISTRICT, ONTARIO, 1926
Finnish bushworkers with their pokasahaat [bucksaws] at an Algoma District lumber camp.

I had no one with whom to play. So, I always had a pack of cards in my pocket, hoping that someone would play cards with me. Dad made me a swing, and that was about it.

Mother noticed that food was disappearing from the lean-to shed attached to the cook camp. When a slab of bacon disappeared, she thought the thief was a bear. I discovered the slab of bacon beside a hole leading underneath the cook camp. Some creature had dragged it there, and then couldn't get it into the hole. That "some creature" turned out to be a skunk! It had made its home under our camp.

One evening the skunk came out. I yelled to the men that the thief was out. They all chased it with sticks or whatever else they were able to grab hold of. What a sight that was—all those men running after one poor little skunk. They killed it! That was the end of the skunk, but not the smell. We called that evening the "big stink." I never knew that anything could smell as bad. I think the men had thought it was a racoon

because I had said "thief"—not "skunk." They discovered their mistake too late!

My parents had a short holiday in Timmins, and then they made plans to go again to a lumber camp for the winter. My father got a job as a teamster. In those days, all the logs or pulpwood were hauled from the forest by teams of horses and long sleighs. He loved animals—especially horses. Every teamster took care of his own horses—brushing, feeding and tucking them in at night. So, when Father got a job as a teamster, he was a happy man.

In early September, Dad had taken over one of the old camps and made it into a comfortable home. Mother then joined him. However, since I was ten years old, I had to go to school. Mother arranged for me to attend Mattagami Public School in Timmins. I stayed with our good friends, Hilma and Kalle Luoma. The Luomas were Finnish immigrants, and Mr. Luoma worked as a miner at the Hollinger Gold Mine.

They had one son, George, who was two years older than me. He was a very good student. He was also shy, and definitely did not like girls. His mother told him to keep a watchful eye over me. On Saturday afternoons we would go to the movies. He told me to walk way behind him, and also to sit behind him in the show. No way was anyone going to say that he was there with a girl! I obeyed. We remained good friends and continually joked about it until George's death in 1989. His parents took very good care of me.

This was the first time that I had been separated from both of my parents. Father had been away many times because of his jobs, but I had never before been parted from my mother. I had always been very close to her. I could hardly wait for Christmas when I could join them for the holidays.

Just before Christmas that year, my mother came to town to do some shopping and to take me to the lumber camp for the holidays. On the morning of Christmas Eve, we boarded the old local train of the Algoma Line that ran towards Sault Ste. Marie and beyond. The train slowly made its way, stopping and jerking constantly. It was dark by the time we reached our destination, although it was only a little after 6:00 P.M. There was no name to indicate the campsite along the railway line, just a pole with a mile number on it.

The mailbag was thrown into a snow bank where there was usually somebody nearby to pick it up. The train didn't stop unless someone made a special request to the conductor. Well, that's what we did and, when the train stopped, the conductor tossed our luggage out after us. I jumped from the steps right into Father's strong arms. He hugged me and tossed me in the air. We were always so glad to see each other. Poor Mother landed up to her armpits in the snow. All of us, including Mother, laughed at her predicament as we struggled to pull her out of the snow bank. Then we made our way through the snow to the road.

I was talking all the time as I had a million things to tell Father. Although he was also a talker, Father didn't have a chance of keeping up with me on that walk. It was a beautiful evening lit by the moon and stars of a clear winter sky and invigorated by the "snapping" cold feel of the air. I was so excited that I even forgot to ask for a ride on his shoulders, which I had always done when I was a little girl.

What a lovely sight our log cabin made as we approached it! It was almost entirely covered with snow except for the windows. A lantern was shining in the window facing the road.

Father opened the door and went in first. He told me to brush off Mother by the door. Snow was clinging all over her as high as her shoulders. How the two of us laughed! Mother's laughter left me with a warm memory because she was usually such a serious and quiet woman.

Inside the cabin was a Christmas tree all decorated with presents underneath. Father had lit the candles to welcome me home. He had cut the tree that very day and decorated it with decorations ordered from the Eaton's mail-order catalogue.

I stood there—and looked and looked at the tree with tears shining in my eyes. I was so very happy that my parents had thought that such a tree would mean Christmas to little people like me. I still remember it as the most beautiful tree I ever had. The smell of that freshly cut tree, the decorations and the candles were breath-taking. I was suddenly aware that my parents had been watching me. I guess they realized how happy they had made me!

Mother said that I could open one gift before we went to a Christmas party in a neighbouring camp. I took the biggest parcel. It felt like clothing—and that's what it was! It was the lumberjack's jacket for girls that I had been hoping for. It was the latest in style with a ribbed band at the waist to hold it snug.

Wearing my new jacket, we walked across the road to another camp where a party was in progress. There was no community hall or church in that area, and so everybody gathered in the largest cabin. It was a good party with about thirty people. There were a number of families with children and single men with families still in Finland. Joulu Aatto—Christmas Eve—is special to the Finnish people because that is when they celebrate the Yuletide. Christmas Day, by comparison, is treated as a quiet occasion with the emphasis on church and family.

As you can imagine, on Christmas Eve in the lumber camp on the old Algoma Line, everyone sang the old familiar songs. My father sang a few solos, and I was asked to sing "Jingle Bells." There was some dancing in which everyone joined.

The coffee-pot was on the stove all evening, and even the children enjoyed drinking it with plenty of canned milk. The women had baked the traditional Finnish goodies, including Christmas cookies, prune tarts, spice cake and my mother's excellent *pulla* (coffee-bread).

On Christmas morning, I woke up to the smell of coffee and the sound of a crackling fire in the old wood-stove. I peeked out from under the blankets, feeling warm, secure and surrounded by the love of my parents. Mother was mixing pancake batter furiously by hand. Finnish pancakes—thin and delicious—have always been a special treat for me.

Father was standing by the stove, warming his hands because he had just come in from the cold. When he saw me awaken, he started to sing a Finnish song, changing the lyrics so that the words were especially meant for me. In a box under the tree was a wee grey kitten. When Father had gone to feed the horses early that morning, he had stopped at a nearby camp to get the kitten that had been kept for me. He knew how to make a little girl happy.

What a wonderful Christmas it was!

5

Cochrane, 1928–31

When we moved to Cochrane in the spring of 1928, I finished my year at Cochrane Public School. The school was at the end of the street where we lived. My parents took over the restaurant in the hotel called the Anderson House.

Mother worked hard again, cooking and serving meals that she was so good at making. Her boarding-house-type food made the restaurant a popular place. The price of a full-course meal was forty cents. Mother always had a hired girl to wait on tables and to wash the dishes. Dad also served and helped. My job was to dry the supper dishes and put them away. There were a lot of them—and I hated it!—but they had to be done.

Father always made me speak Finnish at home, and for which I have always been glad. I came to have many little jobs, such as interpreting for women when they went shopping, or went to see a doctor, etc. They always paid me for my help. Dad spoke English well, but Mother had an accent and was shy about it.

The Anderson House was situated next to the town hall and district court-house. It was owned by Mrs. Anderson, a very nice Norwegian lady, an old-timer of Cochrane. We provided the meals for the prisoners in the town hall, whenever they were ordered. The prisoners

were usually men who had been put into jail for being drunk or for disorderly conduct.

Cochrane was a railway town then. All the men from the lumber camps in the surrounding area went there first before continuing on to their final destination, that is, if they still had any money left. They celebrated there, and the bootleggers made money. There often were rip-roaring fights in Cochrane. The town was especially wild in the spring.

One of the main events of the day was to go to the railway station in the early evening to meet the train. It had become a social hour. One could go there to meet people coming and going, or changing trains. Sometimes passengers just came out to talk as the train waited. One heard a lot of news that way.

I have many happy memories of Cochrane. It was such a pretty town built around Lake Commando. In summer, we swam a lot. The public beach was excellent, and it even had a lifeguard on duty. There one could take lessons or participate in competitions. Everything was well looked after. In the middle of the lake were two peninsulas. On one was the local high school, and on the other—a small beach and pier. We swam mostly there from one peninsula to the other.

Baseball games were popular there. It was one place where the people came to watch baseball games. They all supported their own teams. I loved softball. One year I was the pitcher for the girls' team at our public school. Our fingers were swollen and our hands very sore because none of us could afford to buy baseball gloves.

In winter, skating, skiing and sleighing were the sports that we took part in. There was a rink in town that was mainly used for hockey, but the most popular rink was the one made on the ice in the middle of the lake. The toboggan slide was made on one of the peninsulas by the lake. It cost a penny a ride. It was fun—but we had to walk up to the top of it, dragging our toboggans behind us. We had many toboggan parties there and on the many hills in the area. These parties usually ended with hot cocoa, cakes and hot dogs at someone's place afterwards.

I loved school, and made many friends there. I still write to some of them. I still correspond with one of my teachers, Miss Gwendolen

SR. III IN COCHRANE PUBLIC SCHOOL, 1930
Nelma Johnson is the last girl seated in the middle row.

Horne, who later became Mrs. H. S. Wigg of Kitchener. She made a lasting impression on me. She was an excellent teacher and a caring person. She taught us to write using a free-arm movement. I thank her for that, especially now that my arthritic fingers just don't want to bend. Besides working hard, we had so much fun in her classes. She seemed to have a way of drawing out hidden talents in her students.

My Dad died in Cochrane at the age of forty-two on December 8th, 1930. He had become an alcoholic.* How sad and difficult it was for my

* EDITOR'S NOTE: If alcoholism was a severe problem in Finland, it was made worse for the Finnish immigrants here due the harsh conditions and sense of alienation that they often experienced in the new land. Hence, the temperance society emerged as one of the earliest expressions of organized communal life in the Finnish-Canadian community. The first of many temperance societies to be founded here was Länsnen Rusko Raittiusseura (Western Glow Temperance Society), which was established in 1890 by Finnish coal-miners in Wellington, British Columbia.

By about 1920, the last of the temperance societies was dissolved. By then, their work had been taken over by various secular cultural societies and church congregations. Unfortunately, the problems that various individuals had with alcohol abuse and alcoholism were never overcome despite the Finnish community's many efforts to inculcate the virtues of moderation and abstinence.

mother to watch this happy and talented man deteriorate so fast! He was buried on a cold winter's day in the Cochrane Cemetery. Mother and I accompanied the coffin on the horse-drawn sleigh. How we hated to leave him there. I couldn't understand how they could put anyone into that frozen earth.

I was only thirteen and overcome with grief. Now there were only Mother and myself with no relatives in Canada. Mother tried to keep the restaurant going, but it was a hard life. We stayed until school was over in June, and then we moved to Timmins.

Timmins gave us a new life. I went to Central Public School for my last year of elementary school. My school has since been torn down and replaced with a shopping mall built on its site. This mall occupies the whole site where the school and its recreation areas had been. What a tragedy! A mall was not needed there. I believe that the site should have been made into a park, and the school turned into a museum.

My mother married again, and life was no longer the same for me at home.

I went to Timmins High and Vocational School. There I took a three-year vocational course. I lived for the physical-training periods. I was just wild about gymnastics, dancing and sports.

I joined the Ilo [Joy] Athletic Club and went regularly to its practices at the Finnish hall. The club had a wonderful instructor named Lahja Tanner. He was the best of that time. He was very strict, but made his students learn. For those who had talent and were interested, he would work give them extra time. I learned to do the backbend, handstands, etc., and became good at tumbling. I thank him for that.

He never missed practice sessions either with the girls or the men. He lived a few miles out of town on his farm and, when the weather was bad and the roads were filled with snow and quite impassable, he would ski to town. So, how could any of us dare to stay away from the practices? He was an exceptional man, well remembered and respected by all who came into contact with him.

However, the Ilo Athletic Club was part of the Finnish Organization of Canada which, from the 1920s onwards, gained the reputation for

being very leftist.* My parents did not want me to have anything to do with that sports club because of the political activities in which they believed it to be involved. I had to obey my parents to stop going there, although I still snuck off to the practices without my parents knowing it. Eventually the pressure from home forced me to quit.

All of us—we girls who had been involved in gymnastics—became good friends. Our friendship has lasted through the years, although we have all married and gone our own separate ways. We still have wonderful reunions together, laughing, talking and crying as we remember our youth and the times we spent together in sports and gymnastics.

I finished my school, and then applied for a job at the Consumers Co-operative store in Timmins.

* EDITOR'S NOTE: The Finnish organization of Canada (FOC; in Finnish, Canadan Suomalainen Järjestö) was originally founded in 1911 as the Finnish Socialist Organization of Canada (Canadan Suomalainen Sosialistijärjestö). For a brief period during the early 1920s, the FSOC successively affiliated itself with the Workers' and Communist Parties of Canada. It then re-established itself as a separate social, educational and cultural institution for working-class Finns under the name of Finnish Organization of Canada, Inc., in 1923.

As such, the FOC secured the participation and support of many non-radical, as well as radical, Finns through its varied cultural programmes and activities. As the revolutionary passions of the pro-Communist faction in the FOC grew with the deepening of the Great Depression of 1929, this so alarmed the moderates that they eventually withdrew from the organization.

6

The Consumers Co-operative Society, Limited, 1935–39

The Consumers Co-operative Society, Limited, was founded in 1931 by a group of Finnish people who had broken away from the Workers' Co-operative of New Ontario Limited for the political reasons I outlined earlier.* The Consumers Co-op first established a store in Timmins. It later opened other stores in Schumacher, South Porcupine, Dome Townsite and Hollinger Townsite. An associated Credit Union was started in 1938. The Credit Union and two of the Consumer Co-op stores are still in business.

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* EDITOR'S NOTE: Bitter divisions existed in the Finnish-Canadian community between the "Radical" (i.e. socialist-minded) Finns and the "Church" Finns since the turn of the twentieth century. These rifts were greatly magnified by the massive post–World War I infusion into Canada of Finnish "Red" and "White" immigrants (many of whom had fought on opposite sides in the bloody Finnish Civil War of 1918), further polarizing the community and giving its more conservative elements the strength of numbers and impetus for establishing rival institutions—that is, churches, co-operatives, newspapers, athletic clubs, etc.—to combat the influence of the leftist Finnish Organization of Canada and its affiliates.

It was in this context that the Consumers Co-operative Society, Limited, was founded in 1931 by FOC dissidents and non-leftist Finns. They would have "no truck nor trade" with the Workers' Co-operative of New Ontario Limited because it was politically, although not formally, aligned with the FOC and provided it with financial support to its causes.

THE TIMMINS STORE OF THE CONSUMERS CO-OP, 1935
The Timmins store anchored the expanding business operations and activities of the Consumers Co-operative Society, Limited.

The Consumers Bakery was also started in 1931 with John Koskela as manager and head baker. The two silent partners were Charlie Haapanen and Clarence Carbonneau. It was a good bakery, and the Consumers Co-op handled all of their products. In those days, the bakery truck made home deliveries in Timmins and surrounding area. Baked goods were sold straight from the van.

I started to work at the Consumers Co-op in 1935. It was a small store on the corner of Algonquin and Birch Street in Timmins. In the fall of that year, we moved into the newly built store also on Algonquin Boulevard.

Charlie Haapanen, the manager, was a very strict man to work for. He managed the store as if it were his own business. Although a good business man, he was not diplomatic with his staff or with the customers. However, he did make the Consumers Co-op a success.* Most

* EDITOR'S NOTE: Charles M. Haapanen was perhaps the most prominent figure in the Finnish-Canadian co-operative movement during the 1920s and 1930s. He came to Timmins in 1926 from Babcock, Wisconsin, to serve as the first manager of the newly established Workers' Co-operative of New Ontario Limited. Here Haapanen introduced the expansionist chain-store approach that he had acquired through his

INSIDE THE TIMMINS STORE OF THE CONSUMERS CO-OP, 1935
The Consumers Co-op employees from left to right are: Mike Lehtisalo, Nelma Johnson, Red Gosselin, Rachael Viitasaari, Jack Mustato, Charlie Haapanen (manager) and Vic Salomaa (accountant).

of the original co-op members were Finns and, for the first twenty or so years, all of the minutes and records were kept in both Finnish and English.

We served our customers and walked miles during a day's work. The delivery of the groceries was free of charge, and it was first done with horses and sleigh or wagon. Ivar Aalto was the first driver. Later on, the co-op had several trucks for groceries and a large truck for coal. The coal business was good for a few years because most homes were heated with coal. Most of the co-op's customers had credit accounts, and the amounts owing on them were usually paid on the miners' pay-days.

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experience in the Finnish-American co-operative movement.

In 1930, he decided to return to the United States and resigned his position in the Workers' Co-op. However, when a coalition of FOC sympathizers and pro-Communist Ukrainians began a takeover of the co-operative in early 1931, a dissident group persuaded Haapanen to reapply for his old job. After failing to gain control of the Workers' Co-op from the "Reds" and to have him ratified as manager, the anti-FOC faction founded the Consumers Co-operative Society, Limited, in August 1931. Haapanen then became the Consumers Co-op's first manager.

I started at eight dollars per week. I was inexperienced, but I did speak Finnish and was interested in the Harmony Hall Sports Club, which the Consumers Co-op partly sponsored. That was how I got my job.

The Consumers Co-op store was a busy place. It was open from 8:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M. on regular workdays. It stayed open until 9:00 P.M. on mine pay-days and Saturdays. Pay-days were every second Friday. We had an hour for lunch and a coffee-break in the morning. On Wednesdays, the store closed at 1:00 P.M. However, the cleaning-up and the filling of shelves had to be finished before leaving, and so we were seldom out on time. On Fridays, we always worked overtime—often until 11:00 P.M.—finishing customers' orders for the next day's deliveries. Although we were provided with coffee and sandwiches, Fridays were still very long workdays.

THE "HAPPY BUTCHERS," 1935
Mike Lehtisalo and Bill Valenius cheerfully served their customers at the Consumers Co-op.

The co-op store had order clerks who walked to the homes of those customers who requested this service. The clerks then took their grocery orders, which were delivered on the following day. We worked hard to serve our customers, always remembering to be pleasant and to smile. There were no unions then, and so we received no overtime pay. Because jobs were hard to get during the 1930s, we held onto what we had.

Most of us were co-operative minded and rejoiced at the success of the Consumers Co-op. The shares were priced at ten dollars each. Anyone could buy a share to become a member. Regular customers could also apply one-and-a-half per cent of the price of what they bought

towards the purchase of a share and, thereby, gradually become members of the co-op. Members received a three per cent discount on the total of their annual purchases from the co-op. Once a year, half of this sum was paid back to the members in cash. The remainder went towards the purchase of additional shares in their names.

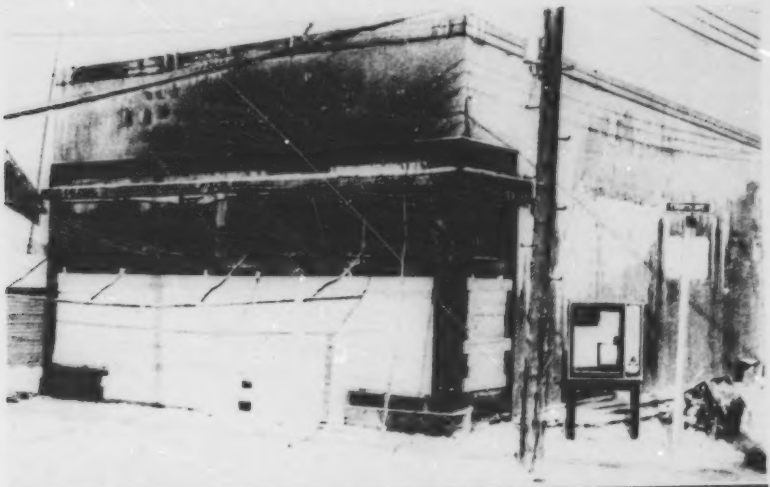
We employees at our co-op store began to think that we should be the ones to set an example to other workers on the question of wages

STAFF OF THE CONSUMERS CO-OP'S TIMMINS STORE, APRIL 1937
"Most of us were co-operative minded and rejoiced at the success of the Consumers Co-op."

and work conditions. We certainly had good reason to demand wage improvements because we should have been better paid than we were. We also became the first to insist upon closing the doors to our store at 6:00 P.M. on Saturdays and pay-days. That started the trend to earlier closings at other stores as well. When we talked to our customers, we reminded them to shop early. The Board of Directors then passed a by-law to allow an early closing on the condition that we didn't lose any business. We did not!

On the morning of December 23rd, 1937, a fire broke out in the store and spread fast. It wasn't long before the whole building was in flames. We were all shocked and saddened at the sight of this new structure being reduced to a shell. No one felt the loss more than the

manager Charlie Haapanen. The *sisu* or "guts" of that man was admirable. He was determined to have a new and better co-op store built. He worked long hours to make it a reality.



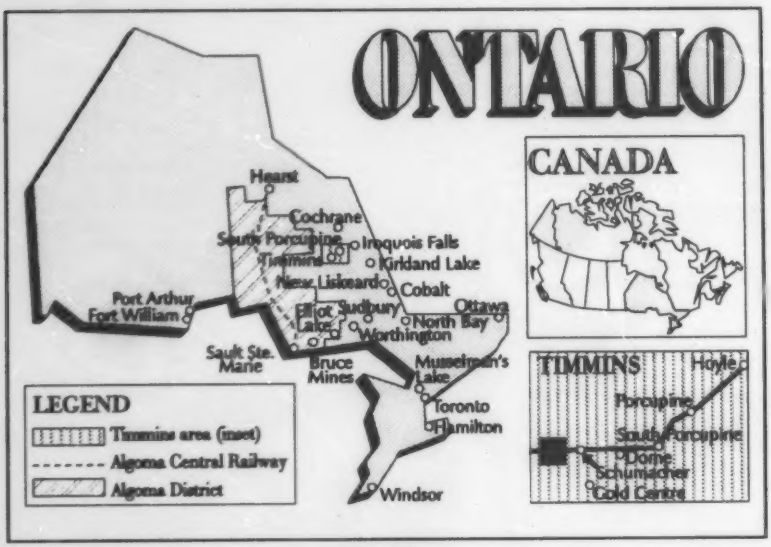
DISASTER STRIKES, TIMMINS, ONTARIO, 1937
The Consumers Co-op's Timmins store after the fire of December 23rd.

The construction of a new building began quickly. The members were all for it. Meanwhile, most of the business was conducted from the other co-op stores. The main office was also temporarily moved into the basement of Harmony Hall, which was located farther up the street. After a fire-sale at the hall, the basement of the burnt building was ready for business. It was not a pleasant place to work in, particularly with the hammering and all the other noise going on upstairs. The members of the co-op were faithful—and business went on as usual.

I worked for a while at the Schumacher store. There Peter Sherbin was the manager. He was a nice man to work for, but the travelling back and forth was too much for me. I received no extra money for bus fare. I was unhappy with the arrangement. When the new store opened in Timmins, I was back there working in the office on the accounts receiveable.

I worked for eight years at the Consumers Co-op, and my wages were fifteen dollars a week when I left. A bonus of twenty-five dollars at

Christmas was started in the last two years that I worked there. I then went to work for Gamble Robinson in Timmins as a cashier. There I received twenty-five dollars a week, which were good wages then. We never worked overtime. Mr. W. Irvine was the office manager, and he was a super boss.



Ontario

7

The Athletic Clubs and Harmony Hall, 1934–43

One of the aims of the Consumers Co-op was the provision of certain recreational activities for its membership. To that end, it encouraged the development of an athletic club for the many talented and enthusiastic young people who belonged to the co-op. The Consumers Jousi [Bow, as in bow-and-arrow] Athletic Club was organized in 1934 by a group of girls. The name Jousi was suggested by John Koskela, the manager of the Consumers Bakery.

The new club's first members were: Doris Koskela, Irma and Maila Riihinen, Edna Kulju, Toini Laakso, Hellen Lehto, Ida Nikumaa, Helmi Kumpula, Rachael Viitasaari, Laura Kari, Ora Kulju, Velma Eimes, Enni Honkala, Aune Hemminki, Aune Alanen, Tyyne Kangas and Elvi Pesonen.

The next year Helmi Ojanen and I joined. We had no instructor, but worked together to make up the routines. The Juniors were instructed by Doris Koskela in 1934 and, from 1935 onwards, by myself.

The names of the first Junior group were: Alde Niinimäki, Marita Forsberg, Hilkka Saarinen, Kerttu Teitto, Helen Korri, Viesti Schroder and two small boys, Andy Majander and Ralf Miettinen.

In 1936, Aku Alakoski of Toronto started to instruct in wrestling, and he continued doing so until 1938. The first young men taking part in gymnastics and wrestling were: Reino and Vieno Aalto, Aare Kivi, Olavi Sundgren, Taisto Viitasaari, Eero Peltoniemi, Mike Lehtisalo, Eero Salomaa, Vili Valenius, Paavo Ojanen and Olavi Pietilä.

The White Eagle Hall on Sixth Avenue was rented for all practices and events. Later on, when the Consumers Co-op's new store was built, we had free use of the recreation room in the upstairs of the store. Any child could take part in gymnastics if their parents were members of the co-op.

In the spring of 1936, the Moose Hall was purchased and we finally had a place of our own. It was re-named Harmony Hall. Plans were immediately made for renovating the hall to consist of a stage, a dressing-room and a small two-room apartment for the caretaker. The downstairs was made into a dining area with a small kitchen. Many other improvements were subsequently made throughout the years.

This athletic club was off to a good start. We held dances and concerts. With the money obtained from them, we purchased equipment such as wrestling- and tumbling-mats.

In 1936, Irene Alakoski started to instruct the women in calisthenics. We had many practice sessions, and from which some of us were selected for the performing team. We trained very hard, and performed at Harmony Hall and elsewhere in the Timmins area.

During the same year, the members of Harmony Hall, whose organization was called the Suomalainen Edistysseura (Finnish Progressive Society), purchased some land on the shore of the Mattagami River. This site was about two miles up the river from Timmins where the water was clean, cool, deep and the current fast. It was named Idle Hour Park. In June of that year, we started a series of clean-up and work sessions called *talkoot*. During the rest periods, coffee, coffee-bread and sandwiches were served by the women. The flies were bad, but they didn't stop the workers.

Those wonderful, hard-working Finnish men, many of them good carpenters, built a public sauna in two sections. One side was for men, and other for women. The *kiuas*, a huge stone fireplace, served both

sections. The wall dividing the two sections reached down to the stones so that half of the fireplace was on both sides. The *kiuas* went down below the floor so that the logs used for heating the sauna could be placed into it from outside. Sometimes the men threw so much water on the hot stones of the *kiuas* that they steamed us women out of our side, making us call for mercy.

Both sections of the sauna were divided into three parts. The first consisted of the sauna proper with its tiers of benches to sit on. The second part comprised the wash-room with its stools to sit on, the taps for drawing cold water from the river and a huge barrel for holding hot water. The dressing-room, which was larger than the wash-room, made up the third part. It had benches around the walls, a large window and two doors. One door led to the river where sauna-goers could take a cooling dip. The other door opened on a connecting hallway that led to the kitchen and refreshment area. Bathers paid a small sum to use the sauna, and then could go in as many times as they wished all day long.

The men also built a kitchen within the grounds of Idle Hour Park. After cleaning the shore for swimming, they built a pier extending into the water. To the pier they added a large diving-board. An outside platform for dancing and a dressing-room were also constructed within the grounds of the park.

Our first Juhannus (Midsummer Day) Eve at Idle Hour Park was celebrated there with a huge bonfire late into the night.* Coffee, coffee-breads and pop were sold. We danced to accordion music played by Vilho Passi.

Idle Hour Park was a wonderful place. We held picnics, corn roasts, concerts, field sports, and played games there. However, the best thing of all was that we had a place to go. There we could meet the gang, have a sauna, swim and relax. Only a few people had their own cottages then, and so everybody went to the park.

In 1943, the Consumers Co-op bought additional land for an athletic field. Its members made a very good track for running. Every

* EDITOR'S NOTE: In Medieval Finland's Christian calendar, Juhannus commemorated the feast-day of John the Baptist. There, as is also the custom throughout Scandinavia, the day of June 24th is now used for celebrating the summer solstice (which, in a sense, harkens back to that day's probable significance in pre-Christian times).

year they held work sessions. The volunteer workers at those sessions kept the grounds in good condition, made the necessary repairs and built new additions to existing buildings. The site was eventually developed into a beautiful park with benches under the trees. It was also equipped with a good stage that had its own small dressing-rooms in the shell at the back.

The co-op group added a roof extending from the kitchen, as well as a floor and two long picnic tables with benches, so that people could eat in the shade. A refreshment stand, ticket booths, outhouses, a new high-diving stand and diving-boards were all added later—all of these were the work of volunteers and dedicated people.

Harmony Hall boasted a good theatre group. Through the years, they put on many very good plays. We had good directors and actors. The latter included Henry Hokkinen, Maija Taskinen and Tyyne Tenhunen. All three of them had been involved in amateur theatre in Finland. They were excellent in any role they portrayed. We learned a lot from them.

Henry Hokkinen was a popular man with many talents. He directed most of the plays. I never regretted the time spent in rehearsals or in performances. It was all good experience, great fun and an excellent way to learn the Finnish language.

A great deal of volunteer work went into the production of a play. Walter Niinimäki was the scenery man as long as I can remember. He was a hard-working man with a wicked sense of humour—and a lot of fun to have along at the rehearsals. Nick Sivula was a quiet man, painting and building scenery. Many people were not even aware of the work that he did behind the scenes. What would the directors have done without people like them? Another person I remember is Lempi Aalto. She was an excellent prompter. She performed a thankless job, but was much appreciated whenever actors forgot their lines.

The women met once a week in the basement of Harmony Hall. They called themselves the Ompeluseura, or Sewing Circle. They sewed and had a social evening, taking turns in providing and serving refreshments for each evening. Coffee and coffee-breads were served to anyone who dropped in. A collection plate was left on the table for visitors. We took advantage of this whenever we had a play rehearsal or a gymnastics

practice upstairs. They also held annual afternoon teas, coffee parties and bazaars. These were very popular events as the hall was open to anyone. Their bazaar items and baked goods were sell-outs. They could never make enough coffee-bread for their customers.

These women also helped us in many ways. Some of them repaired curtains and costumes for the plays. I can remember Martta Niinimäki

THE CAST OF *LIITU-PIIRI*, MARCH 8TH, 1936
In the centre of this photo are Henry Hokkinen, the director of the play, and Nelma Johnson, who is holding the baby.

sewing lovely Chinese costumes for me for a play called *Liitu-Piiri*. They held dinners at Harmony Hall and Idle Hour Park, taking turns cooking and serving. They were a hard-working group of women.

The Harmony Hall Choir was directed by Kaarlo Hyvämaa and assisted by Helvi Small. They had thirty-five to forty members at all times with many good soloists. Hyvämaa was a good choir master, strict and demanding. He always got good results. He was a good violinist and knew his music. The choir had annual concerts and sang at many events in the Timmins area and on radio. They travelled to the annual Finnish festival every year, winning the prize "baton" for the best performance many times. They sang in the "mass" choirs at those festivals, which were composed of all of the separate choirs that had come from different

places. What a joy it was to listen to them and how much pleasure they gave to so many people.

Wedding-bells and people leaving Timmins broke up our original group of Senior girls in the Jousi Athletic Club. However, the Junior girls were becoming a very attractive group of young ladies and were performing at many events at the hall and throughout the Timmins area. The write-ups in the papers (both *Vapaa Sana* [Free Press] and the *Timmins Daily Press*) were very complimentary, referring formally to the girls as the Finnish Gymnastics Team, the Finnish Gymers, the Harmony Hall Gymers and, later on, as the Finnish Aid Gymers. They were essentially the same girls who, with a few additions over the years, were in the Junior Jousi Club and, later on, in the Northern Lights Athletic Club.

I continued to instruct these girls, reading and studying everything I could get my hands on about gymnastics and folk-dancing. I arranged and made up most of programmes myself. It was time-consuming work, but so gratifying when the girls' performances were good. I felt that, in my own small way, I was helping our young people to think about athletics and to be athletic, and helping the girls to grow up into graceful young ladies.*

* EDITOR'S NOTE: The value to their own community and to the country at large of the various institutions that the immigrant Finns themselves created—that is, their athletic clubs, co-operatives, cultural societies and newspapers—cannot be underestimated. Their institutions were of utmost importance in helping them to become better integrated into Canadian society, as well as in providing them with some of the familiar comforts from their cultural past in the new land.

These immigrant institutions also performed another vital service by providing recreational facilities and programmes for the training and development of the Finnish youth and, as often happened, of young people of other ethnic origins. Some of the traditions and customs preserved and promoted by them were subsequently incorporated into the Canadian mainstream, for example, as can be noted in the part played by local Finnish-Canadian athletic clubs in popularizing the sport of cross-country skiing in various regions of the country.

8

Suomi Apu (Finnish Aid), 1939–40

At the end of November 1939, Finland was at war with Russia. It was called the Winter War. We saw it as the struggle between the butterfly and the bear. We were all horrified to think that Russia was going to take by force what it wanted from this little country. Finnish people rallied together all across Canada to help Finland in any way that they could. Many men who had been in the army in Finland went back to fight for the country of their birth.*

An Aid to Finland organization, Suomi Apu, was quickly established.† It included the creation of planning committees together with work and entertainment groups to help make money to send clothes,

* EDITOR'S NOTE: The majority of Canadians were extremely sympathetic to the plight of Finland. The Foreign Enlistment Act of 1937, however, made it illegal for anyone born or resident in Canada to join the military forces of any foreign power. This meant that those Finns volunteering to join the Finnish forces had to sneak across the border into the United States to enlist in the American Finnish Legion. Despite considerable public pressure, the Canadian government delayed in making any decision either to remove the legal impediments against volunteering in the Finnish cause or to waive its usual five-dollar passport fee for anyone joining the Finnish military as a demonstration of its own support for Finland until the very end of the Winter War.

† EDITOR'S NOTE: It was actually the local branch of the nation-wide Canada-Finland Aid Society Fund, which was also known in Finnish as Canadan Suomiapuyhdistys.

food and whatever else was needed to Finland. All kinds of events were held. Our activities were at a fever pitch. All of our events in the Timmins-Porcupine area were very well attended.

The Suomi Apu Choir was formed from a combination of the Harmony Hall Choir, church choirs and singers from the Porcupine area.

THE SUOMI APU (FINNISH AID) CHOIR, TIMMINS, ONTARIO, 1940
Seated midst the choir is its director, Kaarlo Hyvämaa. Sitting beside him on his right is his assistant, Esther Kallio.

It had sixty members and was directed by Kaarlo Hyvämaa. He was assisted by Esther Kallio, Helvi Small and, for a while, by Ossi Walli. It was an excellent choir with many good voices and soloists, among them Olga Pikkusaari, Vieno Kautto, Leo Laitinen, Niilo Hursti and Anne Slack. Their rendition of "Finlandia" was something to remember. The memory of Mrs. Pikkusaari's beautiful voice singing the solo still sends shivers up my back. Vieno Kautto's solo rendition of another song, "Kesäilta" (A Summer's Evening), also haunts my memory.

We held all sorts of events—plays, concerts, dinners, bazaars, teas, and always the weekly dances as well as special-occasion dances. Other fun-times included the sleigh-ride parties. At such events, long sleighs were pulled by horses. The sleighs were covered with hay and filled with people—everyone singing, laughing and throwing each other into the snow.

After a sleigh ride, we would sometimes go back to the hall for refreshments, hot food and coffee. Often we would ride to a farm and have lunch there. One very successful sleigh ride was to the Mattinen

GOING SLEIGHING, 3 MARCH 1940
Harmony Hall members having fun at a sleigh-ride party.

farm on a Sunday. That was fun—and did we have good food there! The money made from the sleigh rides, as from all other events, went into the Finnish Aid Fund.

One very different and special kind of event was the production of a ***kruunuhäät***—an old-fashioned wedding. A couple dressed in Finnish national costumes would play the part of bride and groom. The bride wore a small tiara—the ***kruunu***—as was the custom. First, there would be a dinner served with food typical of that time in history. Then the dancing started. The men would pay to dance with the bride, and they were generous. It was a fun evening. The orchestra played the old folk-dances. They made a lot of money for the cause.

All of us felt that our sense of togetherness in working hard for the same cause would show the people of Finland that they were not alone, and also that we cared deeply for Finland. It was a sad time, but it did get all of the Finnish people together and we got wonderful results.

In 1940, the town of Timmins held a national festival for all ethnic groups. It was held at the McIntyre Arena in Schumacher. The organizers appointed prominent local people to serve as judges. Each national group was asked to present a choral number, a folk-dance, and to show another activity pertinent to its nationality. We had our Finnish Aid Choir, a folk-dance by four couples in Finnish national costumes and a Junior exercise routine.

REVONTULET [NORTHERN LIGHTS], 1940
In front are: Marita Forsberg, Edith Filpula. In back from left to right are: Vi Mäkelä, Alde Niinimäki, Helvi Lehto, Nelma Johnson (instructor), Jean Schroder, Hilkka Filpula, Laila Kojonen.

The exercise routine was of the kind practiced in the schools and athletic clubs of Finland. In the scoring, our choir came second. One of the judges, a music teacher, especially praised our soloist Vieno Kautto. Our folk-dance group came third. We lost points only because we had been unable to get any accordion player to serve as our accompanist for marching in with us in the manner typical of Finnish folk-dances. Our gymnastics routine received enough points to place us first as a national group. We won the cup! We were all very proud and happy.

The Finnish club held a celebration party for us at Harmony Hall to say "thank you!" All the directors received beautiful gifts: Kaarlo Hyvämaa and Esther Kallio for the choir, Irene Alakoski for the folk-dance, and myself for the children's gymnastics number. That was a memorable and a wonderful evening. The trophy that we won still sits in the display case at the Finnish Lutheran Church in Timmins.

9

Finnish Festivals, 1940–46

After all of our rehearsals for the national festival in Timmins—and the excitement of winning—we decided to travel to Sudbury. We wanted to take part in the first Finnish Song, Sport and Co-operative Festival (Laulu-, Urheilu- ja Osuustoimintajuhlat) that was being organized for the Dominion Day (July 1st) weekend and to perform our programmes there. Today these events are called Suurjuhlat or Finnish Grand Festivals.*

It was a long trip from Timmins to Sudbury in those days. It took more than ten hours because not all of the roads were paved. We had to travel by way of Cobalt, North Bay, and through many other commun-

* EDITOR'S NOTE: The full names are Canadan Suomalaisten Laulu-, Urheilu- ja Osuustoimintajuhlat (Finnish Canadian Song, Sport and Co-operative Festival) and Kanadan Suomalaisten Suurjuhlat (Finnish Canadian Grand Festival). The annual festival has been known by various names, including Laulujuhlat (in the 1950s) and Suurjuhlat (from the mid–1960s to the present). Since 1971, the Suurjuhlat have been organized under the auspices of the Kanadan Suomalainen Kultuuriliitto (Finnish Canadian Cultural Federation)—a Finnish-Canadian umbrella organization established for coordinating the national activities of its politically-unaligned member-associations located across the country. The Kultuuriliitto's purpose is to promote at the national level the diverse cultural interests and activities of the Finnish-Canadian community at large as well as the common concerns and aspirations of the member-associations.

ities. (Some thirty years would pass before the building of the present highway.)

THE FIRST ANNUAL FINNISH FESTIVAL, SUDBURY, ONTARIO, 1940
Shown here is the team of Junior girls from Timmins at the festival. In the front row from left to right are: Vi Mäkelä, Hilkka Filpula, Maire Harju. In the back row from left to right are: Alde Niinimäki, Marita Forsberg, Helvi Lehto, Edith Filpula.

The choir had already made their own arrangements to get to Sudbury for the festival. Only seven of the Junior gym girls [*see* the photograph above] coached by me were able to go because they had rides with their parents. We had eight in our folk-dancing group [*see also* the photograph on the next page]. One of the boys had a car, and another boy in the choir was persuaded to take his. We all paid our share of the gas and took care of our own expenses because our athletic club had no money.

We left Timmins at 7:30 P.M. after work on a Saturday. We drove as far as New Liskeard that evening, staying the night at Sunnyside Cabins. I remember that it cost us five dollars for two cabins. We were on the road again early Sunday morning, and arrived at Suomi Ranta [Finland's Shore] Hall and grounds in the Long Lake area of Sudbury at 2:30 P.M.

FOLK-DANCERS AT THE FIRST ANNUAL FINNISH FESTIVAL, 1940
This was the folk-dancing group representing Timmins at the festival. From left to right are: Helmi Jackson, Eero Salomaa, Maila Riikinen, Aare Kivi, Mike Lehtisalo, Doris Koskela, Esko Jokela, Nelma Johnson.

As soon as we arrived, we changed into our national costumes and danced our two folk-dances, the "Koiviston Polska" and "Sappo." I can still remember the warm applause that we received so soon after our long trip. The Junior girls performed their gymnastics display and were a big hit with the audience. Children's performances were always popular.

It rained off and on that day, but that didn't dampen our spirits. I remember the long grass at Suomi Ranta, the muddled parking and the plain wooden platform in the middle of the field. However, all the programmes went on with great enthusiasm. I remember how wonderful it was to be a part of this gathering of Finnish people!

I don't think the performances of the Timmins groups were listed on the official programme of the first Finnish Song, Sport and Co-operative Festival because we did not know until the last moment if we would have rides to go there. When we arrived, however, the festival's organizers immediately made sure that we were included in the programme. Everybody there made us all feel very welcome.

REVONTULET VALIO JOUKKO, 1941
Here is the Revontulet Valio Joukko [Northern Lights Select Team]. In the front row from left to right are: Marita Forsberg, Maire Harju, Laila Kojonen, Vi Mäkelä, Alde Niinimäki, Nelma Johnson (instructor). In the back row from left to right are: Helvi Lehto, Jean Schroder, Helen Korri, Saara Raccha, Hilkka Saarinen, Bessie Illberg.

The festival's dances were held at the Sampo and Long Lake Halls.* You could almost see the steam rising above the heads of the dancers as hundreds of people pounded the floor doing Finnish polkas and other fast dances. What a summer evening! My diary says that we danced until 4:00 A.M.

We were billeted at Mäkinen's place at Long Lake. The boys had the cabin, where four of them had to sleep in one bed. There were many hilarious stories about that experience. The girls slept on a mattress on the floor of Mäkinen's house. We young could sleep anywhere. The Mäkinens were very good to us—and their sauna's wood-stove was always on. We enjoyed our stay with them.

The First of July was on a Monday. After another sauna, we started on the long way home. We were all back at work on Tuesday morning,

* EDITOR'S NOTE: The *Sampo*, a magical grist mill, appears in the *Kalevala*, Finland's national epic. References to the *Kalevala* abound in the Finnish-Canadian community because it is considered to be a major touchstone of the Finnish cultural heritage.

exhausted but happy. We were especially proud that Timmins' Finns had participated at the first of these annual Finnish festivals.

The Sudbury Finns were a hard-working group. It took tremendous effort and good leadership to start something that big. The next few annual Finnish festivals—that is, all the ones that were held during the Second World War—took place in Sudbury. We all learned a lot during the early years of the annual Finnish festival and, with each succeeding year, we saw how much it had improved.

I went to the 1941 Finnish festival with twelve of the girls, where they performed in two numbers. The girls were a big hit. It was the first time for me to experience the audience calling for the instructor to come forward to take a bow. I was happy and proud of the girls. We also had a Gypsy-dance number. Helen Korri, Anita Soni and I were in it. The Sudbury theatre group asked us to repeat the dance in their play the next night because the play was on Gypsy life.

We did not send a gym team to the 1942 Finnish festival in Sudbury because we didn't have transportation or money for our expenses.* Even so, we remained a busy club. Our practices were regular from September to June. We held a spring concert. Many of the numbers used there were repeated at other events.

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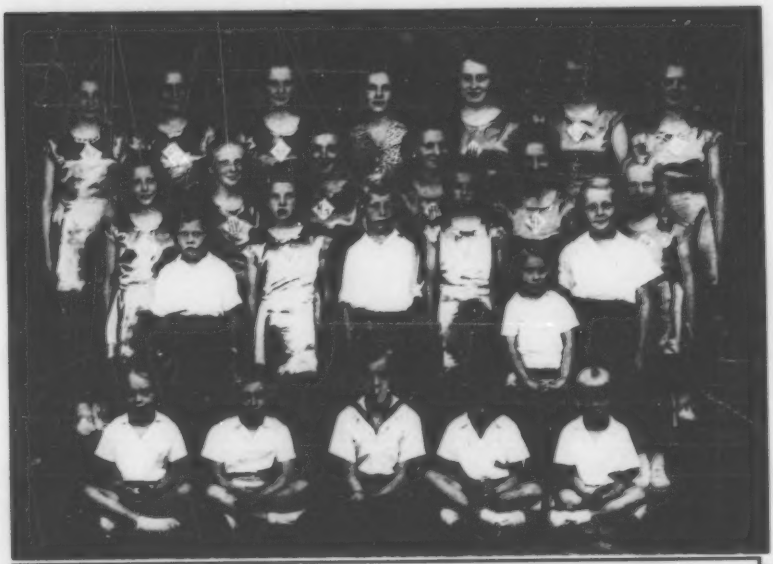
* EDITOR'S NOTE: The renewal of Finno-Russian hostilities in June of 1941—the so-called Continuation War of 1941–44—made it awkward for anyone of Finnish origin to express openly his or her continued support of the ancestral homeland now that Finland was a co-belligerent with Germany. At the end of December 1941, the Canadian government reluctantly declared war on Finland at the behest of Great Britain. It then declared all resident Finnish nationals to be "enemy-aliens" and subject to the reporting of their whereabouts to local registrars of enemy-aliens (usually officers of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police). So, the year 1942 remained an especially anxious time for most non-leftist Finns to celebrate their Finnish identity until the government signalled its intent not to exact any reprisals against them and that it would accord them better treatment than it was then meting out to the "Reds."

By way of explanation, it should be noted that the Canadian government had already used the powers it had under the War Measures Act to punish the "Red" Finns in the spring of 1940 by declaring the FOC and its affiliates to be illegal, suspending their operations, seizing their properties and assets, and arresting and interning several of their leaders. The government still militated against the "Reds" in 1942 despite the fact that their pro-Soviet sympathies now put them solidly behind the Allied war effort.



THE PERFORMING GROUPS OF CHILDREN, 1942
In the front row from left to right are: M. Mäki, Marlene Tolmonen, Leila Hakola, Johnny Kuusisto, Raili Erkkilä, Eileen Rintala. In the second row from left to right are: Bonnie Valenius, S. Nisula, Ken Haapanen, K. Nisula, Malcolm Slack. In the third row from left to right are: Laila Kojonen, Vi Mäkelä, Bessie Illberg, Marita Forsberg, Maire Harju, M. Phizacklea. In the back row from left to right are: Alde Niinimäki, Helvi Lehto, Anita Soni, Nelma Johnson (instructor), Hilkka Saarinen, Helen Korri, Edith Filpula.

We also held a concert for the "Bombed Victims Fund" of England and donated all our proceeds to them. We were always ready to offer our little bit for a needy cause. The war years were very active, resulting in good figures and healthy bodies for the girls as well as numerous activities centred around our athletic club. I like to think that this kept our young people busy and out of mischief.

The athletic club was reorganized with the name changed to Revontulet—in English, the Northern Lights—Athletic Club. It was Isak Mäkynen who suggested the name Revontulet. Klaus Hokkinen designed the crest.

I was away from Timmins at the time, working in Hamilton during the war and then getting married in 1945. During those years—1943,

1944 and 1945—the club had no permanent instructor. However, it did manage to send a girls' gym team to the Finnish festival every year. Elvi Winder instructed. So did Irene Alakoski. Sylvia Sillanpää also supervised one year.

The 1946 Finnish festival was held in Timmins. Irene Alakoski instructed our girls there. In 1947, the girls travelled to Port Arthur. There they performed in a routine with hoops that had been taught to them by Elvi Winder. They also presented a Dutch dance that had been taught them by a dance instructor. The girls were determined to keep active and have their athletic club represented at the annual Finnish festival. Where there's a will, there's a way!

Canada

10

Hamilton, 1944–45

In the summer of 1944, I left Timmins and had a wonderful holiday at Musselman's Lake near Toronto. In that area was a summer resort operated by Mr. and Mrs. Kalle Kauhala. It was a lovely place that offered good food, a sauna, swimming, hiking around the lake and dancing at the pavilion close by.

One special feature was the sign located by the steps leading from the outside of the sauna to the roof. The roof itself was boarded up for private, nude sunbathing. At the bottom of the stairs, we would just turn the sign around to say "Women Only," and then proceed to climb up to the roof to get a tan all over. The men claimed that no sign was necessary because the chatter could be heard from a mile away telling them who was up there.

From there I went to Hamilton to visit my friend Doris Koskela. I worked for a month at the Household Finance and Loan Corporation office in Hamilton. Then, through Doris' influence, I was able to get a job in the office of Irvin Air Chute, a parachute factory. I had wanted to be in the war effort in some way. It was a very interesting place in which to work. The repairing of used parachutes and the making of cargo parachutes and the beautiful silk ones for the paratroops were fascinating to see.

I met a lot of wonderful people there, and made many friends. Among them were Ellen Alderwood, the forelady, and Carl Green, the manager of the Hamilton branch. The main office and plant were in Fort

Erie. The Royal Canadian Air Force sent two men—Sergeant W. Robson and Warrant-Officer James Powers—there as its inspectors. Jim was a lot of fun and always full of jokes. We shared a warm feeling of friendship, and had a lot of parties and dinners. We also sold a lot of war bonds.

I lived at the YWCA—the Young Women's Christian Association—close to my work. The building was large. It accommodated many women of all ages. It was inexpensive, and the food there was plain but nourishing. During the war years, everyone had someone overseas. So, we were always celebrating something or comforting someone whose loved one was in the Dieppe Raid or some other conflict and hadn't been heard from for a long time. We had many happy evenings—the pyjama parties and tea parties in which everyone crowded into one room.

Each floor had a pantry equipped with a hotplate, shelves with dishes and a kettle, where we would take turns in making tea. We could go through one of the hall windows onto a lower roof for sunbathing or downstairs to the pool in the basement for a swim. We also went on hikes to the many parks and lovely flower gardens that were all over Hamilton.

We walked everywhere when exploring the city. Sometimes we would walk up the mountain to the sanatorium. I also went often by bus to the sanatorium to see a friend of mine—Elsa Niemi—from Timmins. We would go to the Sunday afternoon concerts of the symphony orchestra, which were being broadcast over the radio, and to the band concerts at the park. Many times we took the bus to Toronto to see stage plays at the Royal Alexander Theatre.

On Sunday afternoons, the YWCA would have an open house for the servicemen in the area. The churches took turns in providing the refreshments and a short programme. Games, like cards and checkers, were also played on those occasions. All the girls at the "Y" were invited to attend.

Hamilton was a training centre for the servicemen from all over Canada, the United States and England. Because they were coming and going all the time, we met a lot of nice boys, had dates and went to many dances. Hamilton was a lively place during the war—and a great place to be!

11

V-E Day, May 8th, 1945

On May 8th, 1945—V[ictory]-E[urope] Day—the long awaited announcement came that peace had been declared in Europe! The war there was over! Hallelujah!

We were told at work to go home and celebrate. How could anyone work? The excitement was overpowering!

Everyone was on the streets, cheering, crying, laughing and hugging each other. Bands were marching and playing. The soldiers in Hamilton were parading up and down the streets. It was an exciting time!

We went to the church next to the YWCA. It had a special service —like all the other churches were having—to thank God that the war was over.

12

Paul: B29308

When war was declared in September 1939, there was great excitement in Timmins about our boys joining up and going overseas. And sadness. We were suddenly aware that they were not boys any more, but now were accepted as men ready to fight for what they believed in and quite possibly to die for their beliefs. This was serious—and very frightening.

The first group from Timmins—sixty-nine young men—left on May 9th, 1940. The station was crowded with people saying farewell and the train was full of excited men. I was sad that day because my boyfriend, Paul Sillanpää, was leaving too. I had been going steady with Paul, and we were beginning to care a lot for each other. He knew that he would be one of the first to be called up, and so he volunteered because he wanted to be with many of his friends. One of them was Kauno Korri. Their outfit was called the Royal Canadian Engineers, Number Two Road Construction Company.

They were only a few weeks in Toronto before being given a weekend leave to come back to Timmins on May 26th. It turned out to be their embarkation leave. As soon as they went back to Toronto, preparations were begun to ship them overseas. Their ship, the *Duchess of Atholl*, arrived in Liverpool on June 20th. It was Paul's twenty-third birthday, and he spent it on ship waiting to disembark. He never dreamed that he would spend five more birthdays in Europe. The sad

news for him that day was his learning for the first time that France had fallen and that the British had been routed at Dunkirk. He said afterwards that it was a frightening introduction to Europe.

All of Paul's training was in Aldershot, England. I had so many letters from Aldershot. How the Canadian soldiers hated the boredom and the loneliness there! Besides the training and their work, they had nothing to do except to visit the surrounding towns and go to a show or a pub. Some of the towns that he visited were: Redhill, Oxshott, Surbitan, Kingston, Esher, Cobham, Epsom and Wimbledon. On pay-days, the pubs were full and many fights resulted. The Canadians had to have action somewhere.

COMRADES-IN-ARMS, 1940
Kauno Korri and Paul Sillanpää are standing in front of their barracks in Aldershot, England.

In Timmins, Paul had worked part-time for a tailor named George Ojanen. From him, Paul had learned to press pants and to make alterations to them. When the men in his unit discovered this, he became much in demand. Everyone asked him to have their pants pressed. He charged twenty-five cents per pair. One anecdote I often heard was the time that somebody asked Paul to press his pants for an especially big date. As a joke, Paul pressed them sideways. The man was furious. Of course, Paul had disappeared by that time (and, I guess, waived his twenty-five cent fee). The soldiers were always playing practical jokes on each other.

Paul remembered many people who were kind to him and to the other Canadian soldiers. One lady, whom everyone called "May," lived in Earlswood. She had her own family, but always found extra room at

her dining-room table for Canadians stationed far from home. Paul spent many an evening there and had many good meals.

Another exceptional person was Mrs. Joan MacMaster, whom the Canadians referred to as "Mrs. Mac." Her home was in East Grinstead in southeastern England. She had a son in the British Army. She drove for the Red Cross and worked in the Red Cross canteen. She was then, and would remain to the end of her life, deeply appreciative of the Canadian soldiers stationed in Britain during that perilous time. She was a good friend to Paul.

THE UNIFORM OF THE DAY, 1940
Paul Sillanpää wearing the regular issue of the Canadian Army serviceman, Aldershot, England.

After the war, when we were living in Yellowknife, Paul and I sent her a parcel containing canned butter, tea, coffee and sugar. Mrs. MacMaster proclaimed this parcel to be pure gold. All of those items were still on the ration list in Britain. They were also rationed elsewhere in Canada, but not in Yellowknife.

Although I never met "Mrs. Mac," I corresponded with her until her death in 1979. I especially remember her several heart-warming letters to me when she learned that Paul had died in 1975.

Paul sent me write-ups from the English newspapers about a road they were building "somewhere" in England. On the opening of the road, nicknamed Yonge Street by the Canadians, Prime Minister Mackenzie King of Canada arrived to inspect the project. The prime minister was not popular with the Canadian soldiers. So, the soldiers booed him. I couldn't believe that when I first heard of it. The soldiers blamed King for keeping them there inactive and bored. They wanted to get the war over with, and then to go home.

BUILDING "YONGE STREET," 1940
The boys from Timmins in the #2 Road Construction Company of the Royal Canadian Engineers building a road "somewhere in England."

In one of his letters, Paul said that London had been badly bombed on September 7th, 1940. The attack had lasted from seven to eight hours. Some of the soldiers were there on leave and had almost been hit by machine-gun bullets as they lay flat on the street. They said that they would not go to London again because it was much safer at camp. The bombing had gone on all around them. However, the campsite where their barracks were located was never hit—at least not while they were stationed there. Paul said that he often saw planes falling from the sky and exploding in flames.

The following passage is from his letter of October 21st, 1940:

> I had a weekend leave to London, hitchhiked there, and we walked all over London seeing the sights; the air raid sirens sounded four times one afternoon but no bombs dropped around where we were. Then, the night raid started at 7:00 P.M. We took the subway back to the YMCA and then I realized what this war was like.
>
> All the underground stations were packed with people spending the night in these evil-smelling places. Still they seemed to be in good spirits, joking, playing cards, knitting and trying to get their children to sleep. I

hope to God that the people of Canada never have to go through all this as it is far from being a picnic.

Paul was stationed in London during the Blitz when some of the worst bombings took place. He was once on guard duty when King George and Queen Elizabeth came to inspect a badly bombed section of London. They passed in front of him as he was standing at attention. Paul told me that the Queen had the loveliest complexion. He was especially impressed with their friendliness and the concern they showed. On July 8th, 1941, Paul joined the Canadian Provost Corps.

"ON GUARD FOR THEE," 1940
Paul Sillanpää on sentry duty in full battle dress, Aldershot, England.

In September 1943, Paul joined the Canadian Intelligence Corps. When the formal course was over, his unit was sent on a short boat trip. He believed it to be a part of their training. No other information was given to the men at the time.

Instead, their boat became part of a large convoy being sent to Italy. It turned out to be a rough trip. The convoy was bombed on the way by the enemy, and at least three ships were lost. Kauno Korri, Paul's good friend, was on one of the ships that sank. Kauno spent several hours in the Mediterranean before being rescued by one of the other ships in the convoy. The Allies in that convoy landed in Italy on November 8th, 1943.

The Canadians who landed in Italy went through many hardships and battles. Paul had many narrow escapes, but he was one of the lucky ones who survived.

There was one of Paul's wartime letters that made me furious. Paul wrote that they once again had bully beef for Christmas along with a special bonus of two bottles of beer. We in Canada had been short of turkeys that Christmas because, as the government proclaimed, they were being reserved for "the boys overseas." Why then were the regular Canadian soldiers getting bully beef again? I recall that many of us Canadians on the Home Front didn't mind doing without turkey so long as our boys overseas could enjoy it for Christmas. (Paul also told me that the American soldiers in Europe had turkey that Christmas.)

Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Paul could say very little in his letters. No towns were to be mentioned except for the major cities. Every letter was stamped "passed by the censor." On the back of the envelope, the writer also had to sign: "I certify on my honour that the contents of this envelope refer to nothing but private and family matters."

One aspect of the Canadian military remains indelibly impressed on my memory from that time—B29308. That was Paul's service number. No matter where he was stationed—even though I myself did not know where that might be—I could at least hope that my letter would get to him when I put that number on the envelope. I wrote to that "address" for more than five years.

I later asked him about the meaning of some of his more formal wartime addresses. The notation "2 CBRD" meant the Second Canadian Base Reinforcement Depot, which held the reinforcements for the front lines or for wherever else they were required. "Fourteenth Field Security Station" referred to the unit that was responsible for the security of the troops and civilians.

Paul said that the work, if occasionally interesting, was boring most of the time. One of the towns in which he was stationed was Rieti, Italy. Once he was the only Allied soldier in a town of twelve thousand Italians. When a carnival opened in that town, the town's chief of police came to invite him to attend as one of the guests of honour. So, there was some fun included in his line of duty.

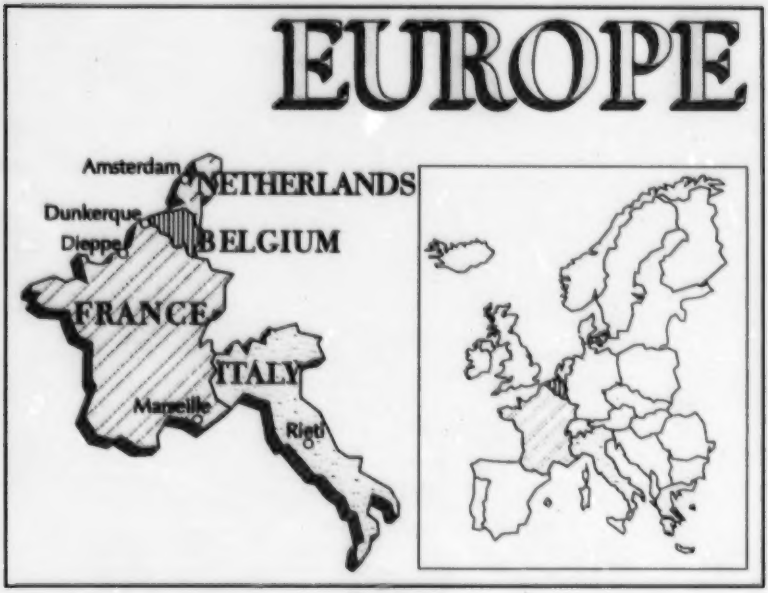
Sometimes Paul was ordered to perform the duties of a motorcycle dispatch-rider. He would then take information to another army camp. Because it was a long ride by motorcycle, he would usually play checkers with a friend at that camp, stay the night, and then drive back at daybreak.

One particularly beautiful moonlit night, Paul felt restless and very lonesome. So, he decided to ride back to his camp the same night. He always told me that, in being lonesome for me that evening, saved his life. The next morning, the members of his camp were told that the army camp he had visited the day before had been bombed. Everyone there had been killed, including his friend. It was a memory that would haunt him for many years afterwards.

Once near the end of the war when the commanding officer of Paul's camp was away for a few days, word came that some Germans were hiding in a nearby farmhouse. Paul had to lead a few men there to capture the enemy. He then did so. Whenever Paul spoke about this, he would say that there was really nothing to it because he had taken the enemy by surprise. However, the Canadian officer in charge later gave Paul the German officer's gun, a nickel-plated Luger, saying that he had earned it. Paul treasured that gun as one of his few mementoes from the war.

I wish that I could remember more of Paul's stories, but he only felt like talking about the war on rare occasions. There were so many escapades—and a number of close calls.

Tiring of the local food, Paul would sometimes save his rations and make himself a meal on a small burner in his room. He would also use the goodies saved from parcels sent to him from Canada. He especially remembered the Christmas cake from the Finnish Lutheran Church's parcels. Those parcels were most welcome, and everything in them was gratefully received.



Europe

However, the loneliness, boredom and disgust came through in his letters as the war went on and on, year after year. "Four years and we are still here, and there seems to be no end to it," he wrote in one of his letters. Paul's unit left Italy. It arrived in Marseille on March 11th, 1945, and then in Belgium on March 18th.

On April 1st, Paul's unit landed in Holland. They were part of the Canadian Army liberating Holland. When peace was declared, Amsterdam was still under German occupation. When the Canadian troops marched into Amsterdam, it was a hugely joyous occasion. The Dutch people were delirious with joy, cheering, throwing flowers, hugging and kissing the Canadian soldiers as they marched by. While Paul was driving one of the trucks, people would climb up to embrace him. This is from his letter dated May 13th, 1945:

> The streets were jammed with people and we were one of the first Allied troops to enter the city and what a welcome we got! The police were trying to hold them [the crowd] back and some places you could only crawl along, hardly enough room to let a truck go by. All the people were wanting autographs and I think Clark Gable has never been more popular

than we were that day. I signed my name so many times that I was still doing it in my sleep.

Paul told me later that it was an incredible day to remember. He felt happy and so relieved that the war was over at last! He now began to wait (impatiently) for the orders that would let his unit begin the journey home.

On June 29th, their duties in Holland were finally over. They were sent to England to await passage home. They left England for Canada on the ship *Ile de France*, which was jammed with Canadian soldiers. General H. D. G. Crerar, Commander of the First Canadian Army, was on the same ship. When the Canadian Press interviewed General Crerar upon their ship's arrival in Halifax on August 5th, the newsreel of that interview showed Paul standing right behind him. It was the first glimpse that we were to have of Paul after so many years.

Paul sent me a telegram, which was waiting for me when I got back to the Hamilton YWCA after a week's holiday at a summer resort at Musselman's Lake near Toronto.

Paul telephoned me from Toronto on the same day that I got back from my holidays. It was during dinner hour at the "Y"—and what excitement that call caused! My dinner was left uneaten as I rushed to catch the evening train to Toronto. I still find it unbelievable how the girls from our table immediately got up to help me get ready. They helped me to dress. They called a taxi to take me to the station and saw me off for the most important date I had in a long time.

Paul was standing in front of the Royal York Hotel as I walked there from Union Station. He looked so much older than the boy I last remembered. He was a man now, and his face showed that he had experienced much. He had been overseas for five years and three months.

We stared at each other. He took both of my hands into his and said, "Hello, Kultu!"—a pet name he had for me.

I said, "Hello, Paul." It was all that I could say.

Then he said, "What a beautiful tan you have!" That broke the ice. We both laughed and started to talk. We had so much to tell each other. We held hands as we walked. We had coffee somewhere. We took a

streetcar to Sunnyside. We walked. We had an ice cream cone. We took the streetcar back. We couldn't decide where to go. We just wanted to talk. The evening went by so fast. I caught the 11:00 P.M. train back to Hamilton. Paul had to report back to the barracks.

After a few days, Paul had his leave. He spent a few days in Hamilton, and then left for Sudbury to visit his father who lived in a small Finnish-Canadian farming community thirty miles to the west of Sudbury. This community is known as Beaver Lake and is situated near Worthington, Ontario, the place where Paul was born. I went to Timmins for the second week of my holidays to visit my mother. Paul came to Timmins to visit his relatives and friends while I was there. We became engaged on August 21st, 1945.

Paul went to Toronto to get his discharge from the army. I returned to Hamilton. The Hamilton branch of Irvin Air Chute was closing, and the factory workers were being laid off. A few of the staff were transferred to Fort Erie. I received my notice as I had expected.

The girls at the factory presented me with a lovely wedding gift. Doris held a shower for me at the YWCA on September 13th. She invited all of the friends that I had acquired there. I was so very pleased about the shower, and yet so sad. I thought that, now that the hated war was over, I would probably never see any of them again.

In a matter of days I bought my wedding gown, did some trousseau shopping, packed my trunk and headed back to Timmins.

What an exciting few weeks! So many of my friends were still in Timmins. They held a shower for me. The older Finnish women also gave me a shower. Many of them were mothers of the children I had instructed in the athletic club. I received so many lovely and useful gifts.

On October 2nd, 1945, Paul and I were married at the United Church. Pastor Franz J. Koski of the Finnish Lutheran Church in Kirkland Lake officiated. Kalle Luoma gave me away. Sylvia Sillanpää, who was married to Paul's brother, was my matron of honour. Ruth Westerholm was my bridesmaid. Kauno Korri was Paul's best man. Bill Sivunen and Paul's nephew (Sylvia's son), Paul C. Sillanpää, were the ushers. Paul and Kauno wore their army uniforms. Mrs. J. Wilkins played the organ. Laila Sivunen sang "I Love You Truly." She had such a lovely

voice. I had been Laila's bridesmaid when she married Bill in 1942. This was the first time that Ruth and Kauno had met. We danced at their wedding two years later.

THE WEDDING DAY, 1945
Nelma Johnson and Paul Sillanpää were married on October 2nd.

My mother held the wedding reception at Harmony Hall. She found it impossible to send out wedding invitations to all the Finnish people. This was especially so with those living in the Timmins area because I had been so active in Finnish activities there. Not wanting to leave anyone out, she had a general invitation printed in the Finnish- Canadian newspaper, *Vapaa Sana*. The hall was crowded. The orchestra played our favourite music, and we danced the night away. It was a good wedding.

Laina and Mauno Honkala, Paul's uncle and aunt, drove us to a lovely inn at Iroquois Falls. The ladies, who were helping at the reception, packed a delicious lunch for us and the inn provided us with a huge thermos of coffee. That was the food we enjoyed the most. I had not eaten all day. I was so nervous. No one knew where we were, and we spent three days there away from everyone.

13

Yellowknife, 1945–46

Two weeks after the wedding, we were on our way to Edmonton to visit Paul's brother Walter and family. Paul hoped to get a job in Yellowknife since his brother Bill was working there already. We heard that wages in Yellowknife were good and people went there to make their "stake." So, we thought that here was a chance for us to save some money with which we could buy our own home later. Paul went to the employment office in Edmonton and was hired. We stayed in Edmonton for almost three weeks before we were able to leave. Paul was told that there was no accommodation for women in Yellowknife, but we didn't want to be parted any more. So, I just went along.

We flew from Edmonton on November 15th, 1945, on a CPA [Canadian Pacific Airlines] plane together with our luggage and a lot of freight. There were also several other passengers on board. We all sat on benches on both sides of the plane. There were no seat belts, and it was cold and not very comfortable.

However, Paul and I didn't complain because we were warmly dressed and of hardy stock from Timmins. I had on longjohns and woollen ski pants, woollen socks and winter boots, a sweater, a long fur coat and the parka from my jacket. I was warm, but still kept my fur mitts on.

I remember one woman who was travelling from Toronto to be with her husband for Christmas. She was smartly dressed in a lovely cloth coat and hat, leather gloves, nylons and neat overshoes. She almost froze! Blankets were supplied by the crew, and they did their best to keep her warm. I'll bet that she remembered her trip for a long time.

It was a very bumpy ride as we headed into stormy weather. We made a stop at Fort Resolution, and another at Fort McMurray.

The crew served us a cold-plate luncheon and coffee in the small airport in Fort McMurray. We waited for a while before being informed that we were in a blizzard and that it was impossible to land in Yellowknife. So, we were driven in an old bus to the one and only hotel in Fort McMurray and stayed there the night. By the next day, the weather was good and away we went.

The scenery was very bleak and monotonous with nothing to see but snow and ice—and a few trees. I thought to myself, "Where am I going, and what am I doing here?" This was the beginning of a drastic change in my life. I was scared! We landed eventually at the tiny airport in Yellowknife, and then boarded an old bus to rattle on into town some six miles away.

Yellowknife was a hodgepodge of tents, shacks and styleless buildings built upon a large rock. The only hotel had twelve rooms and one bath. In the bus depot, which was only a shack, we hovered around the stove until Paul's brother Bill came to meet us. Then we got into a taxi and drove over the ice of Yellowknife Bay to Negus Mine Village three miles away. This one and only taxi did an enormous business driving around the town area and upon the iced-over bay to Conn Mine Townsite, Negus Mine and the Indian Reservation on the opposite shore. He charged fifty cents per person, but his taxi was always full.

Bill had been able to rent a small three-room cabin. His wife Sylvia had joined him only a few weeks before we arrived. Sylvia and I were old friends. We had worked together at the Consumers Co-op in Timmins. She had also been my matron of honour at our wedding. We stayed a week with them, using their couch for sleeping. We were crowded, but glad to have a place to stay.

"Mac" McNiven was the manager of Negus Mine at the time. Paul started to work at Negus the next day as a miner underground. Because he was a veteran and I was already there, his name was put at the top of the list of men waiting for houses. We were given the first available house. It was next to Bill's place. Being a company house, we paid rent

THE CAMP NEXT DOOR, 1946
Paul Sillanpää visiting his brother Bill. Bill's wife Sylvia is standing in the doorway of their home in Negus Mine Village, Northwest Territories.

of only fifteen dollars a month. It was supposed to be furnished, and I guess that—by Yellowknife standards—it was.

The kitchen had built-in cupboards, a sink and counters. However, to my surprise, I discovered that the water drained into a large pail under the sink and had to be emptied outside. The furnishings included a table, four chairs and a large wooden box with a lid. The box sat beside the stove and was used for keeping our firewood in. It soon became a cosy spot for me to sit upon and read.

The small living-room had a big box-stove for heating. That was all. The tiny bedroom had a double bed, but no headboard. We rolled up a blanket into a headboard so that we wouldn't freeze our hair against the wall. The bedroom had a small doorless closet for clothes and, as well, a second closet with a door. It was the inside bathroom.

The toilet had a regular seat and lid. It also had a large pipe going up through the ceiling and coming out like a stove-pipe on the roof. To my horror, the toilet had a pail underneath that had to be emptied. The outside toilets were a risk to use because of the intense cold. During the

NO INDOOR PLUMBING, SPRING 1946
Paul Sillanpää carrying water to the "Honeymoon Cottage" in Negus Mine Village, Northwest Territories.

three months of winter, the warmest to which the temperature would rise was thirty-seven degrees below zero [-37° F] and the coldest to which it would drop was sixty-seven degrees below zero [-67° F].

Our house was on a cliff facing the lake. With no trees in front for protection, we got the full force of the wind. Paul shovelled the snow as high as he could all around the house to help keep out draughts.

My days were taken up with housework. In the mornings, I would knock off the icicles that appeared on the inside of the bedroom window because we had no storm-windows. The water in our pails was nearly always frozen—at least on top. No need for ice cubes! The fires in the stoves had to be kept going.

I had no electrical appliances except for my iron. We did have electricity because Negus Mine had its own electric plant. I did not have

a washing-machine—not even a wringer. We purchased a big galvanized tub to use for washing clothes and bathing. We also bought a boiler for the top of the stove for heating water on wash-days.

Washing clothes was an all-day job. Paul had to wring out the heavy items after he came home from work because I did not have the strength in my hands to do so. At first, I hung our laundry on the clothes-line outside. However, after struggling into the room with my husband's longjohns frozen stiff, I vowed never to do that again. Thereafter, I hung the wash in our living-room and had the stove going "full blast" to dry it. Wash-day was fun and so picturesque with all the laundry decorating the living-room.

Later, I heard that a family was leaving and selling their household items. I was the first one at their door. I bought their hand-powered wringer! We attached it to the edge of the laundry tub. At least now I could wring out the wash myself. It was still hard work, but what an improvement!

I made furniture out of boxes. My vanity in the bedroom was made with a wooden butter-box in the centre and orange-crates on either side. I covered it with some bright material purchased from the Hudson's Bay Company store. I hung a mirror on the wall, which did very well. Another butter-box became a stool once it was topped by a cushion and covered with the same kind of material as on the cushion itself. We also made a couch in the living-room with boards and boxes, covering them up with a red blanket. You could do a lot with butter-boxes and orange- and egg-crates in those days because the wood in them was quite sturdy.

Learning to bake bread became a "must" because we had no bakery there. After many sad experiences and a few tears, I finally mastered the wood-stove and the art of decent bread-making. I also found out that, when the oven indicator showed 350° F, it meant 250° F. To make the bread rise, I opened the oven door and placed the bread dough upon it. The dough was in a bowl covered over with a towel. Then I placed chairs around the oven, hanging a blanket over them to keep out draughts. It took a lot of experimenting, but I eventually succeeded in having delicious coffee-bread and good whole-wheat bread.

I remember one hilarious experience. I had previously made one long, braided, coffee-bread loaf successfully by following the recipe

exactly. So, this time, I decided to make two by doubling the recipe. I also doubled the yeast, which was a mistake. When I opened the oven door, the two loaves had risen so much that they completely filled the oven. I have never seen such huge loaves of coffee-bread!

When my husband came home from work, he had to carry in the water. The men made a hole in the ice on the bay and, every evening, you could see them walking down to the water-hole—gossiping no doubt —and then each one trudging back up the hill with two pails of water. Then Paul had to chop and carry in the wood, and that was a chore.

Every home ordered logs for firewood. When they were delivered, the men borrowed the company's power saw. They would then go as a group from house to house sawing the logs up into shorter pieces to fit the different sizes of wood-stoves. This was called the "sawing bee" by the women. Then the wood had to be piled into sheds. It was later split and chopped as needed.

A shed was a necessity to every home, not just for storing wood but also for food. It was our freezer for extra bread, meats and crates of oranges. The shed also provided me with my first experience with frozen orange juice. In the evening, I would take out six or so oranges and place them in a bowl on the kitchen counter to thaw. In the morning, I would make orange juice from the thawed oranges.

Fresh vegetables were flown in, but they were very expensive. We had canned goods at our Negus commissary that were sold to us at cost. The men were also able to purchase all their work clothes at cost, and this was a real saving for us. Another good thing about the North was that we had all the butter, sugar, coffee and tea that we wanted, although these things were still being rationed elsewhere across Canada.

The Indian reservation was across the bay from us. We could see the Indians travelling back and forth with their dog-sleighs. They were the only ones who could hunt caribou and sell the meat. It was the cheapest meat that could be bought, and many of the women in town preserved it in jars.

One day I was all alone in the house when the door opened. In walked an Indian man. I was scared out of my wits. He had left his dog-sleigh with its load of meat at another house while he went from house

to house taking orders.

He said, "Cawiboo!"—and held up two fingers.

I said, "Okay!"—and held up one finger, indicating that I only wanted one quarter of a caribou.

It cost three dollars. That was my first purchase of fresh, if frozen, meat in Yellowknife. I kept my doors locked from then on.

When Paul came home, he cut the meat up into roasts, steaks, etc. He then proceeded to fry two caribou steaks and the house began to reek of smoke and frying meat. Although the house had filled with smelly smoke and the steaks seemed to me to be a bit tough, even I had to admit that they were delicious.

I was so glad that my husband had a fair knowledge of cooking. He certainly knew more than I did. He had cooked many times during emergencies while in the army. He made the fires in the mornings. He also made the coffee—and that wonderful habit of his continued for the rest of our married life. It was so nice to get up in the morning when the coffee was ready.

The sun rose around 10 A.M., and set at approximately 2:30 P.M. It was always dark when Paul got home from work after 3 P.M. The days were short. There was no television in those days, and the radio reception was poor. What was there to do for recreation? We read and played cards. We played a lot of bridge. I played at a two-table women's bridge club, and Paul played with three other men once a week. We also played a lot of bridge with other couples—the Albers, the Days and the Wysses. Nora and Roy Albers were our neighbours. We became good friends, and have kept in touch to this day.

Once a week, the ladies had a bowling night. The Negus recreational building had two lanes for bowling. They also had a large hall upstairs with a stage. They held dances occasionally. We married couples would go there early and leave early because the dances got rough after 11 P.M. We would finish off the evening in one another's home. Men outnumbered women at least fifty-to-one, so most of the single men would drink and fight. Those who didn't want to drink would ask if they could baby-sit to get away from it all. Baby-sitters were free for those who had children.

After every dance, the men's bunkhouse was a mess. For some reason, they would always break its windows. It was wild! I remember the Valentine's Day Dance when nearly every man had a "Valentine" [a black eye or bruise] the next day. Some had more than one. There is nothing like a Valentine given with a fist!

The mail was flown in to us. It was special. How we waited for our Christmas mail! I remember going to the post office after Christmas to get my Christmas cards that were being held there due to insufficient postage. It was airmail from Edmonton. I had to pay $1.50 extra for my bundle of cards, but it was worth it!

The tractor-trains operated in winter, delivering parcels and other supplies. They had to depend on the weather. It was hard going when travelling over the ice.

Christmas started with a big children's party in the church hall in Yellowknife. I watched as Santa Claus landed in a plane on the ice of the bay. Then a dog team brought him to meet the cheering children on the shore. They all went into the hall and had a great time. My belief in Santa Claus was restored when I saw him!

It certainly was a different kind of Christmas. We didn't even have a Christmas tree. Christmas trees were so scarce that we left them to families with children. We had a few trees around the side of the house, but didn't have the heart to cut any of them down.

I wanted to make traditional Finnish coffee-bread for Christmas. I started it early in the morning but, for some reason, it didn't rise. Paul came home early from work since it was Christmas Eve. He brought in his work partners—Lasse Laine and Slim Levo—for a drink. I forgot the bowl of dough that I had placed on the shelf behind the stove when they came in. After the men left, we went to Bill's place for the evening. The following morning Paul found the bread dough frozen solid. He came to the bedroom door and rapped hard on the dough. It made a sound like knocking on wood. He asked, "What's this, little girl?" I groaned and pulled the blanket over my head. He never let me forget that.

The Negus Mine gave all the families a gift of a turkey. The delivery of those turkeys a few days before Christmas became our joke of the year. The two men, who delivered the turkeys, went from house

to house. Every family offered them a drink as was the custom. By the time they reached our house, both men were in a rare condition. They pushed open the door and crawled in on all fours with a poor turkey slung over the back of one of them. We offered them a drink. There they just sat on the floor and drank their drinks!

We had company that night. So, our men went out to drive the two soused turkey-deliverers home and to take their company truck safely back to the garage. We talked about this for days and compared notes. They were good turkeys. I cooked my first one that Christmas with plenty of advice from Sylvia.

On Christmas night, a few couples dropped in for a drink. They invited us to go along with them to visit other houses. They said that, if we sat at home with the lights on, everyone passing by would come in for a drink as was the custom. Well, we didn't have that much liquor in the house. So, away we went singing, visiting and having a wonderful time!

It was a lovely night, clear and cold with the Northern Lights playing across the sky. I shall never forget the beauty of those Northern nights. One of the houses we visited was Leslie Gray's. He was the manager of the Negus commissary. He was also a lot of fun. When we were ready to leave, he joined us. I guess that he didn't want another gang like ours coming in either. He played on his banjo for us. So, now we had music.

Some of the other houses were so small that we couldn't sit down. Everyone just stood and sang. When we finally got home, I was sick! I guess the home brew didn't agree with me. I can remember being on my knees on the floor and my husband placing a basin in front of me. I swore that I would never drink anything again. I wasn't much of a drinker anyway, and I sure wasn't used to the style of wild Yellowknife. It was only coffee for me from then on!

The Yellowknife drink was the "Short Snorter." It was made with a generous serving of rum and maple syrup on top. You took it down in one gulp. All you could taste was the maple syrup. "Very nice!" they said. However, after a couple of them, you were bombed.

NELMA SILLANPÄÄ AND FRIEND, 1946
Nelma holding a cat at the back door of her home in Negus Mine Village, Northwest Territories.

After Christmas, one of the Finnish men with a terrible hangover came over. He asked us if we had any whisky. I said that we had an unopened bottle of rye. I told him that he could have it if only he would return another bottle of the same when the next month's rations were being sold. He said, "Never! By that time, I shall want another drink!" He put fifteen dollars on the table and left in a great hurry. In those days, a forty-ounce bottle cost only three or four dollars. I told my husband that I was now a "bootlegger."

That same Christmas, a trapper came into town on Christmas Eve and paid a hundred dollars for a bottle of wine and a half-case of beer. It was all the alcohol that he had been able find on sale in Yellowknife. Liquor and beer were rationed at that time, and a permit was also required when buying one's rations of alcohol. That is why home brew was so popular there. Thirsty men were also constantly asking if you would sell your rations to them—and many families did. The beer saloon was for men only. However, the talk was that some women would even sit outside the saloon and wait for the men inside to pass them a bottle

of beer through the open window. Of course, that only happened in summertime. Where there's a will, there's a way!

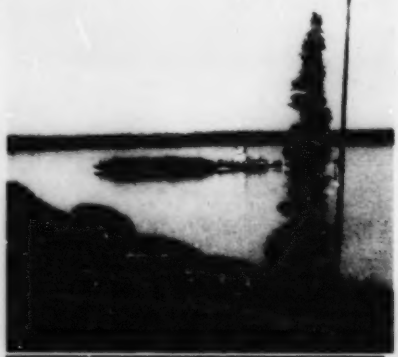
Spring was in the air. I hurried to the Hudson's Bay Company store to buy my new spring outfit—rubber boots! They were necessary items because the roads were terrible. Even the main street in town was ankle-deep in mud!

When the spring break-up started, the fishing began. The men didn't know what to do with all of their fish. So they gave them away—big, delicious whitefish! We had all the fish we could eat. I had to refuse offers of a lot more fish because we had no place to keep them.

Excitement ran high when the bets were made as to the exact time that the first supply boat would be coming. I waited for that supply boat, hoping to get some potatoes. I had been out of them for weeks, and so were the stores. We did have dehydrated vegetables in packages and cans that were good enough for adding to soups and stews, but I had a craving for real potatoes.

I watched from my window as the boat with its trailers came into view on June 10th. I went out and took a picture of it as it slowly went past.

People were cheering on the banks as they waited for the supply boat to reach Yellowknife's pier. The celebrations went on all night. It was a big event. The boat contained two thousand cases of beer—and no potatoes! I did not celebrate.



NO POTATOES ON BOARD!
The arrival in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, of the first supply boat of the season from across Great Slave Lake, June 10th, 1946.

All through the short summer, barges and boats brought supplies across Great Slave Lake.

June was a lovely month. At that time of year, you could read a newspaper outside all night because it was so light. The sunrises and the sunsets were breath-taking. Everywhere between the rocks and the cliffs, and on top of the cliffs, wherever there was a strip of earth, people planted gardens that grew so fast in the constant light. We went to a wedding in which the couple stood on the cliff with Yellowknife Bay as their background to say their vows. Their rings were made of Yellowknife gold. It was a touching moment—and a lovely wedding.

It took only a winter of snow and bitterly cold weather to make me appreciate the beauty of this land in the spring—the vast territory of rocks and cliffs, the beautiful skies and the deep blue waters of Great Slave Lake. I felt a little sadness when I thought of leaving. I also knew that, were we to stay any longer, the land would get into our blood and we would become true Yellowknifers.

Paul did not renew his contract because he was not in the best of health. The years spent overseas in the war had left their mark. He was now anxious to get into Sunnybrook Hospital for treatment. So, we said our farewells and flew to Edmonton in a better plane and on a much better flight than the one we arrived on. Then we travelled by train to Timmins.

We were glad that we had gone to Yellowknife because we had saved enough for a down payment on a house. I also felt that I had matured. After my pioneer efforts in the far North, I was better able to cope with life. I knew more about cooking too. There has been no better teacher than necessity—and, for me, that temperamental old woodstove. My husband claimed that we had never been as close since. Because of the extreme cold, I was literally glued to his back in bed. With his every turn, I turned also. It was a good honeymoon.

14

Return to Timmins and the Finnish Festivals, 1946–53

We were happy to be back in Timmins. There we could start looking for a house and settle down to build our future.

We bought a house on Cameron Street. We then moved into the small three-room apartment upstairs and rented out the four-room apartment downstairs because we needed the money. It was tough going for a while. We called it our penny-pinching time. Then Paul got a steady job at the local post office sooner than expected. He was a veteran. His years in the army had paid off for once. They put him at the top of the list for hiring at the post office.

He worked inside for a while, but the old post office in Timmins was a stuffy place. It gave him very severe headaches. He made many trips to Sunnybrook Hospital in Toronto for treatment and medicine. Finally, he decided to ask to be transferred to outside work as a letter carrier. Walking in the fresh air proved to be good therapy.

Our son was born on June 13th, 1947. We named him Paul Lennard Charles. He was a healthy baby. When he was a year old, we moved downstairs into the larger apartment. My mother, who had been working as a cook at a lumber camp in the Kirkland Lake area, came back to Timmins and rented the upstairs apartment.

In the fall of 1947, the girls asked me to take over the instruction of gymnastics for the Northern Lights Athletic Club. I had a small baby, which made it a bit difficult. I thought it over, and then agreed to start in January 1948. The girls were very enthusiastic. They wanted to go to the Finnish festival that was to be held in Toronto that summer.

The Finnish Song and Sport Festival in Toronto was one of the nicest events that I have ever been to. It was held at the beautiful Exhibition grounds on Lake Ontario. The weather was perfect. The grounds and stage were excellent. Thousands of people attended the three days of events. The festival was very well organized.

Our club rented a bus and filled it with club members. Ken Evans played the accordion and we all sang. Everyone was in high spirits. It was a fun trip! It had been a very active spring with many fund-raising dances and a concert so that we could have enough money to pay for the bus and some of the expenses.

The girls were in good form and performed in three numbers. The first two were a *vapaaliikeohjelma*—or free-movement rhythmic exercise—and a Finnish folk-dance performed on the bandstand stage. We also performed a "Keep Fit" exercise number with twelve girls on the green lawn. I had also arranged for a tumbling-and-pyramid routine with eight girls and eight boys. This was also performed on the grass, and it went over well with the audience.

We had a very good track-and-field team on that trip too. The young men from our club made a wonderful showing at the festival. Our relay team, which consisted of Ken Wagner, Don Warren, Armas Joki and Aaro Tolonen, came first. Our athletes also placed well in many other events. Ken Wagner stole the show.

It was a good year for the club. We were proud of our boys and our girls! Even the *Toronto Evening Telegram* gave us very good coverage with many pictures in the paper. The *Telegram* picked two young people as its choice of typical Finnish athletes. They were from our club—Hilja Ryhänen and Eddie Heino. They were all a healthy, glowing and happy group of young people.

Mrs. Josephine Wilkins was our musician. She had served in that capacity for many years. She was a very talented woman who arranged

the music to go with our routines. If she wasn't able to go with us on a trip or to play at one of our performances, she would write the music and Ilona Pihlaja would play it for us. Ilona went with us to Toronto. She played for us on many other occasions too. She was always ready to help us. Sometimes Lou Vacchino would accompany Mrs. Wilkins on the accordion, which added to the volume and rhythm of the music. In earlier years, Mrs. Jean Larcher also played for us. She was a lively person and a good pianist.

In 1949, the Finnish festival was held in Sault Ste. Marie. We were well represented in field sports and gymnastics. Our girls performed in two exercise routines. The third number that we presented was a tumbling act with three boys and three girls. Vi Mäkelä, Alde Niinimäki, Helen Korri, Don Collins, Matt Luhtanen and Don Warren were on that team.

We were all billeted in cottages. Our young people celebrated the success of their performances with a bonfire and wiener roast in the outside fireplace. They had so much fun that they literally danced the grass away. I can still remember the owner of the cottage sadly viewing the results of our dancing the next morning. It had proven impossible for us to make the grass grow back overnight.

In the fall of 1949, we held a gymnastics competition for individuals with three judges presiding—Isak Mäkynen, Elvi Winder and Sylvia Sillanpää. In the afternoon, the girls did their compulsory exercises, first as a group and then individually. I had arranged their exercises for them. They each performed their routines alone at a concert that evening. It was to see how well they would be able to perform in front of an audience and show their individual creativity. The first eight girls with the highest marks were selected. Alde Niinimäki, Vi Mäkelä and Helen Korri placed first, second and third in that order. They did it with so little difference between them that all three could have as easily tied for first place.

The first eight, highest-scoring girls were selected for the rhythmic-gymnastics number. The rest were asked to perform in a folk-dance. However, all of the girls took part in the "Keep Fit" routine. This was a fair way of picking the girls for each of those performances. Rehearsals started immediately after the competition.

We held a very successful concert in the spring with all of our members participating. The opening march was impressive. All of our group marched into the back of the theatre area from the outside. They proceeded from there up the centre aisle through the audience and onto the stage carrying their flags. We had two accordionists, Lou Vacchino and a student of his, accompany us. They added pep and a special feeling to the march.

Everyone was surprised at the large number of our members taking part. I gave the welcoming words once all of our members were on the stage. The Spring Concert was always good practice for the upcoming festival. Harmony Hall was packed. So, we were able to raise some money. Everyone was happy with the results.

THE 1950 LAULUJUHLAT
The annual Finnish Song and Sport Festival was held on July 1st—Dominion Day as Canada's great national holiday was then called—at Idle Hour Park in Timmins, Ontario.

In 1950, the Finnish Song and Sport Festival was held in Timmins. It was a tremendous job for a lot of people. Isak Mäkynen was festival chairman that year. I have never seen anyone else work as hard as he did. Idle Hour Park was put into first-class condition under his direction. I was nominated as the head instructor for gymnastics and as our club's representative on the festival committee. That involved a lot of work and time.

Because Revontulet had a very large membership at the time, some of the Senior girls were asked to instruct the different groups. I continued to instruct the Senior girls. Vi Mäkelä had the little girls. Alde Niinimäki took the Juniors. Hilkka Saarinen, who had earlier organized the Intermediate group of girls, continued as their instructor. Jens Begtrup instructed the men. Helen Korri instructed in folk-dancing. They all performed in their own programmes at the festival and also took part in the opening march.

That year, we took two "firsts." One was for *yhteisvoimistelu* (mass-gymnastics). The other was won by the girls for their *kilpavoimistelu* (competitive-gymnastics) routine.

A JOINT EFFORT AT THE 1950 LAULUJUHLAT
The yhteisvoimistelu (mass-gymnastics) group performing at Idle Hour Park, Timmins, Ontario.

I arranged to have a mass-gymnastics exercise routine that was suitable for both men and women, and then directed it. Alde Niinimäki drew the figures. We then sent that programme to all the sports clubs that were expected to participate. It all went off fairly well. At least, so I heard. I was not able to see for myself because I was too busy taking part in our group's activities. It rained so hard on the night before the performances that, by morning, the athletic field was almost entirely under water along with all of our markers. So, we had to perform on uneven ground in another area of Idle Hour Park. We couldn't trust the weather, but we were still determined to have the show go on.

The competitive-gymnastics routine took a lot of arranging to make it a part of the programme. I drafted some basic rules that were accepted by the festival committee:

1. Only six to eight girls were to be on each team.
2. No routine could last longer than ten minutes.
3. Each routine was to be a free-movement programme (*vapaaliike-ohjelma*).
4. Judges were to be chosen each year from the different clubs participating in the festival.

The co-op stores in Timmins, Sudbury and Port Arthur provided the prizes—a pennant and one hundred dollars. The money was to go to the sports club sponsoring the winning team. Its purpose was to promote more interest in the sport and better performances from the girls.

The Revontulet Senior girls won in competitive-gymnastics that first year. The festival dance was held at the Riverside Pavilion with the music of Henry Kelneck's orchestra that year. Henry had a good orchestra. He always included Finnish music when he played at our dances. He had his own vocalist, but that night Leo Laitinen sang many of the songs. I shall never forget Leo singing "Kulkurin Valssi" (Vagabond Waltz), a song that was a favourite of the Finnish people. He was one of the soloists in the Harmony Hall Choir and sang at many concerts. It was always a pleasure to hear him.

In the fall of 1950, a seminar was held in Sudbury at the Sampo Athletic Club's hall. It was the first time that representatives from all of the Finnish athletic clubs had met together to learn the mass-gymnastics routines, the men's gymnastics routines and the folk-dances to be used at the next festival. I was asked to represent our club, and it turned out to be a tough weekend. The instructor at Sampo Hall was Eino Heikkilä, a very good gymnast. The year that he instructed there, the Sampo Athletic Club had an excellent men's gymnastics team called Sammon Pojat (Boys of the Sampo). They performed at many festivals.

The Finnish festival held in Sudbury in 1951 was very well attended and a huge success. Revontulet sent a large group to take part in the mass-gymnastics routines under the direction of Eino Heikkilä. I took my Senior girls team, and they won the competitive-gymnastics prize for the second year. They also performed in a "Keep Fit" exercise

routine. The Intermediate girls instructed by Hilkka Saarinen also performed there. We also had a folk-dancing group, and many of our members took part in track-and-field sports. It was a fun festival blessed with lovely weather. Many of the young people took time out to go swimming in a nearby lake.

The three-day festival included many activities—concerts, a play, track-and-field sports, a church service and several dances. Many other attractions were added throughout the years, depending on where the festival was being held and what the host community had to offer. For example, if there was a shooting range in town, the festival also had shooting competitions. Craft shows ranged from good to excellent. The festival also began to feature a Finnish game called *pesäpallo*, which is somewhat similar to American baseball. Exciting competitions resulted from the pitting of one good *pesäpallo* team against another. In later years, soccer games were also added to the festival programme.

Something was always going on. Many meetings were scheduled for the different festival Committees. The Finnish Canadian Historical Society also met at the festival, as did many other Finnish groups.

The festival dance, which signalled the start of the three-day festivities, was customarily held in an arena or the largest available auditorium in town. They still are! The "farewell" dance, however, was almost always held at one of the Finnish halls. Those dances were always crowded! The bands were usually made up of Finnish musicians or of other musicians who knew Finnish dance-music well. Sometimes visiting orchestras from Finland played at the dances too. It was great fun—and still is! Many of the new generation are learning the Finnish dances through their participation in folk-dancing. If you can folk-dance, you can dance!

The year 1952 was again a very active year for our club. We held dances, a spring concert and many other fun events. These events helped in raising money and in promoting enthusiasm. At one of the dances, we held a "Miss Northern Lights" competition. It got the club a lot of great publicity.

Nancy Koskinen became our first Miss Northern Lights. She received many gifts that had been donated by local merchants. We also had a course on *luonollista liikuntaa*, or natural-movement gymnastics.

It was conducted by Pirkko Kosonen, a gymnastics teacher from Finland, who resided here for a few years. I took the course, and so did many of our girls.

THE 1952 LAULUJUHLAT

The Revontulet/Northern Lights Girls' Team at the Finnish festival held on Dominion Day in Port Arthur. In the front row from left to right are: Velma Laurila, Nancy Koskinen, Leila Hakola, Doris Salminen, Martha Joki. In the second row from left to right are: Anneli Junka, Raili Erkkilä, Lorna Small, Asta Orpana, Ellen Niemi, Taimi Hujanen. In the third row from left to right are: Kaarina Hujanen, Nancy Orpana, Pirkko Orpana, Eileen Rintala, Elizabeth Lof, Margaret Suominen.

The 1952 Finnish festival was held in Port Arthur.* A large contingent from Timmins went there to take part in many events. We travelled by car all night and arrived early the next morning in Port Arthur. It rained all day on the day of the open-air concert, so the concert was held in an arena. Our "Keep Fit" exercise routine had sixteen girls in it. The Senior girls team of eight won the competitive-gymnastics prize for the third consecutive year. The girls also danced the Maypole Dance, which was directed by Jean Joki.

* EDITOR'S NOTE: The twin cities of Port Arthur and Fort William historically had the largest concentration of persons of Finnish origin in Canada until the 1970s, when Toronto acquired that distinction. The twin cities were amalgamated on January 1st, 1970, as the City of Thunder Bay.

Mrs. G. Adams from Port Arthur wrote a letter to the editor of the *Timmins Press*. Her letter was published in the newspaper as follows:

To the Editor:

> It gives me very great pleasure to write you to let you know how very much I enjoyed your Northern Lights Gym girls, they were so lovely and the instructress was perfect and special mention to the lady at the piano, every note was perfect and that means a lot. The arena was packed for the event. I hope it won't be too long before they are all back again. The group is a credit to any city or town. I am a member of the Park Board and of Civic Recreation here and that is why I take such an interest in that special type of work. So before I close may I say, through you, good luck to the girls and may they go far.
>
> Your truly,
>
> Mrs. Grace Adams

The lady at the piano was Josephine (Joe) Wilkins, a noted musician and composer, and I was the instructress she was referring to. We were surprised and happy to receive such recognition.

That year we were invited to take part in the Noranda Sports Arena's Grand Opening. The girls performed rhythmic routines and the boys did tumbling and apparatus work at the opening. We drove down in cars and had a wonderful time.

One of our Senior girls, Alde Niinimäki, who was then the club secretary, went to Helsinki to see the Olympics and to take a course in gymnastics. We held a farewell dance, and gave her the proceeds so that she could bring back gymnastics and sports knowledge to our club. Marita Forsberg took over Alde's Junior group of girls in her absence. Helen Korri also left town to attend university. She eventually became a physical-education teacher at the University of Western Ontario.

In the fall of 1952, the new season started with a meeting on October 4th at Harmony Hall. The new president was Oliver Pietilä, a popular man and a good worker. We had eighty members now. Many of the Senior girls volunteered to help with the younger members. Raili Erkkilä, Leila Hakola, Doris Salminen, Ellen Niemi and Denise Ferguson all worked with the young members with good results.

Oliver Pietilä started to instruct the Junior boys, and Matt Luhtanen assisted with the tumbling. Don Collins instructed the Senior

boys. We were all interested and enthusiastic about getting the best out of the young people. I was still instructing the Senior girls and the folk-dancers. All of us were very busy.

The year 1953 was a very active year again with many things going on. We held an individual gymnastics competition with three judges presiding: Pirkko Kosonen, Liisa Karje and Jean Joki. The winners were: Nancy Koskinen, first; Raili Erkkilä, second; and Denise Ferguson, third.

On May 1st, we held a very successful dance featuring the Don Collins orchestra. We held a raffle, a spot dance and a polka contest. The latter was won by Anna-Liisa Siipola and Erkki Jokinen. We also held a Miss Northern Lights contest. Fourteen of our girls in lovely evening dresses competed in it. The title was won by Eileen Rintala. She received flowers and many gifts from the local merchants. Corsages and gifts went to Martha Joki, who placed second, and Raili Erkkilä, who came third. It was a very exciting evening for the girls.

Timmins celebrated the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II with a huge parade and outdoor concert at Hollinger Park on June 2nd, 1953. Our Revontulet group was invited by the town to participate. When the Consumers Co-op let us use one of its huge trucks, the men quickly started to work on a float for it under the direction of Ruben Peterson. Ruben was a gifted window dresser at Bucovetsky's department store at the time. He designed the float and made the decorations. The workers were: Isak Mäkynen, Walter Niinimäki, Eino Aaltonen, John Viitaniemi and Väinö Klemola.

It was a beautiful float driven by George Mäkynen. Eileen Rintala, our Miss Northern Lights, sat on the hood of the truck. The flag-bearers, Laila Raihala and Don Warren, stood behind her on the platform. Vilho Raihala played the accordion. The folk-dancers, who were dressed in Finnish national costumes, danced on the platform that had a green grass carpet on it. A huge decorated arc over the top proclaimed: "The Northern Lights Athletic Club."

The rest of the girls in their white uniforms and white gym slippers marched behind. I marched with them in a national costume. It was very impressive. The Finnish people of Timmins had made a good showing. It was such a long march through city streets that the girls' slippers

wore out. The slippers all had holes in their soles—and we had a good laugh. It was a memorable day.

THE 1953 LAULUJUHLAT
A group of performers from Timmins at the Finnish festival held in Sudbury, Ontario.

The 1953 Finnish festival was in Sudbury. We travelled by car there to take part in all the activities with great enthusiasm. The concert there was held in a theatre that featured a good stage and a packed house. The girls made a good showing. They performed flawlessly. They again won in competitive gymnastics for the fourth consecutive year. It was a wonderful ending to a year of hard work! Three of the club's young men also did very well in sports. Kalevi Siipola, Don Collins and Olavi Lehtinen brought gold medals to the club.

We had a folk-dancing group of four couples that I directed. All the girls performed in a "Keep Fit" exercise routine. They had on new outfits for that number. Their outfits consisted of shorts made out of a soft, navy material with elastic on the legs for a snug fit, a silver-blue

sleeveless top with the club's crest sewn on it, and soft, white dancing-slippers. The girls looked slim, trim and lovely in their new clothes.

THE START OF THE 1953 LAULUJUHLAT
The folk-dancers in the opening march of the Northern Lights group.

The club uniform was a white satin, sleeveless tunic over neat, close-fitting, white shorts. The club crest was sewn on the skirt. It was a comfortable outfit designed by Mrs. Esther Forsberg, a mother of one of the "gymers." When the girls performed in the competitive-gymnastics number, they were barefoot. However, they wore the slippers in their other numbers and the marches.

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Timmins, 1954–59

I decided to take a rest in 1954 because most of the Senior girls were dropping out of the club, getting married and moving away. There were so many weddings, and most of the girls had their wedding receptions at Harmony Hall. It was a happy time for them, but a sad time for our sports club. A new era was beginning.

I continued to be active in my own way. We had another son, Daryl Allan. He was born on September 13th, 1955.

My oldest boy, Lennard, was in Cubs and Scouts. So, I became active in their Ladies Auxiliary, serving as a secretary. We held bake sales and other activities to make money for helping out the Cubs and Scouts organizations. With Lennard attending Mattagami Public School, I also became active in the Home and School Association. I served on its executive for some time, including one year as president. We were a very active group.

The Town of Timmins' Recreation Department asked me to start classes for women and children in "Keep Fit" exercises. That turned out to be a big chore. It started off with about sixty women one evening—and then grew into a hall full of children on the second night. I worked very hard for two nights a week. I picked out seven young Finnish girls and taught them a routine to music. They performed on the local

television station, CFCL, and at a few concerts. It was good publicity for the town's Recreation Department.

I was also on call at Timmins High and Vocational School as a substitute physical-education teacher. I worked steadily for three months and, from then on, I became a regular supply teacher. I instructed all the girls' classes in Finnish-type exercises and in tumbling. I also trained them in track-and-field sports.

DARYL AND LENNARD, 1955
Paul and Nelma Sillanpää's sons.

The 1954 Finnish festival was held in Sault Ste. Marie. Some of the girls were eager to go there. They wanted to take part in competitive-gymnastics, but had no director. They asked Pirkko Kosonen to instruct them. They again won first prize, which was now a cup.

The Finnish festival was held in Toronto in 1955, and in Montréal the following year. The girls won the cup both times under the direction of Mrs. Kosonen. Miss Northern Lights was Doris Salminen.

In 1957, the Finnish festival was held for the first time in Windsor. Seven of the Northern Lights girls took part in competitive-gymnastics under the direction of Vi Mäkelä-Collins. They again won first prize—this time for the eighth year in a row! Because Vi had been one of the original girls who had performed at the festival in 1940, I was especially proud of her.

The years from 1958 onward were not active years for our sports club. It seemed that no one wanted to take on the leadership of group activities. The club was represented by individual athletes taking part in track-and-field events. One of them was Matti Kiiveri, who won many races. Another event sponsored by the club was cross-country skiing. Martti and Simo Kalviainen and Eero Uusitalo won prizes. Eero won the thirty-kilometre championship in 1959.

The 1959 festival was held in Timmins. Vi Mäkelä-Collins instructed the girls in the exercise routine for mass-gymnastics. They performed with all the "gymers" from the other clubs, and were directed by an instructor from another club.

In 1966, the Finnish festival was in Sault Ste. Marie. Alde and Bill Hujunen travelled to Sudbury to attend the seminar for learning about the folk-dances chosen for that festival. Then they instructed the Timmins group. It was interesting to note how many went to Sault Ste. Marie to take part in a mass folk-dance display. Among the participants were: Alde and Bill Hujunen, Seppo Kuokkanen, Ann Marie Sutherland, Seppo and Hilkka Sorsa, Marie and Vic Grikis, Eva and Raimo Pitkänen, Risto and Marja Paananen, Toini Salminen and Aili Lahti. It was proof that the club again had the young people and their interest. All they needed now was an instructor.

The members of the Edistysseura of Harmony Hall held dances to pay for the taxes on the hall. They also ran the sauna at Idle Hour Park and kept the grounds in good condition with the aid of volunteer help.

Harmony Hall came to a sad end. It was sold to the Town of Timmins, and the space where it once stood was made into a public parking-lot. Just think of all of the work that had been undertaken by so many wonderful, dedicated people. They had been so determined to keep our Finnish culture going. Now it was all gone! The hall was all paid for, but the new generation had not cared enough to pay the taxes to keep it going—and to keep it there as a symbol of what can be accomplished when we all work together.

The 1980 Finnish festival was held in Vancouver. It was very successful. All the events—and even the lodgings for the festival's visitors—were on campus at the beautiful University of British Columbia. A very different event was also held there—a salmon barbecue. It was very fitting for British Columbia, where so many of the Finnish men had been fishermen.

Alde Hujanen, one of our original Northern Lights girls, instructed the members of the local Vancouver club in folk-dancing. She was living there and active in the club. They took part in the "mass" folk-dance directed by Matti Vanhapelto from Thunder Bay. Ever since he has been in Thunder Bay, the Finns there have had an excellent folk-dancing

A Reunion of Northern Lights Members, 1987
Celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Northern Lights Athletic Club at Idle Hour Park, Timmins, Ontario. From left to right are: Marita Forsberg Burwell, Vi Mäkelä Luhtonen, Helvi Lehto Thérien, Leila Hakola Jarvis, Jean Schroder Joki, Helen Korri Kunkel, Margaret Suominen Juuti, Raili Erkkilä Puppo, Nancy Koskinen Seppänen, Hilja Ryhänen Inch, Eileen Rintala Yli-Joki, Elvi Lamsa Tyynelä, Nelma Sillanpää (instructor).

group and have held many seminars on folk-dancing. He is an exceptional man, a good dancer and director. The Thunder Bay dancers have become famous in the Finnish-Canadian community and have travelled to all the festivals. They also had concert tours in Florida and Australia. They are known as the Kiikuriit [See-Sawers] of Thunder Bay.

The Finnish festival was held in South Porcupine and Timmins in 1982. There I was happy to see a new girls' gymnastics team performing under the banner of the Northern Lights. They were directed by Mrs. A. Ristimäki. However, she could not continue to instruct the girls and there was no one else to take her place. The same old story—no instructor, no group!

A reunion of the Northern Lights Athletic Club and the friends of Harmony Hall was held in Timmins from July 31st to August 3rd, 1987. The years spent with this athletic club left good memories, and it was

heart-warming to see so many old friends return to take part in the activities planned by Helen Korri Kunkel and her committee. The club must have meant something to all of them because they wanted to be with each other. It was a happy occasion.

I remember so many other good people who did so much volunteer work in aid of Harmony Hall and its many activities. Maija Riihinen did a lot of the write-ups on those activities for *Vapaa Sana*, the Finnish-language newspaper which was (and still is) published in Toronto. So did Laina Mäkynen whenever we asked her to do so. Her husband, Isaac, was always ready to help the young people to keep our athletic club going.

I remember John Koskela speaking at many concerts. He was the manager of the Consumers Bakery and a man worth listening to. His daughter Doris became a lifelong friend of mine. Bruno Tenhunen was another guest speaker. He had been a member of the Parliament [Eduskunta] of Finland before coming to Canada. He was also a founding member of *Vapaa Sana*. He worked for the Consumers Co-op during the time I was working there. He was a very interesting man.*

Vilho Passi and, later, Vilho Raihala were always ready to play the accordion for the dances. Jallu Korri, a happy barber with a great sense of humour, was always in on every activity and work-group. He would often play the accordion at parties.

Idle Hour Park is still there. It was sold by the co-op store to the Harmony Hall Company. They run the sauna, keep the grounds in good condition and do the necessary repairs. It is sad to go back to the park because the place echoes with memories. I can hear the voices and

* EDITOR'S NOTE: Bruno Tenhunen was a major figure in the Finnish-Canadian community. During the 1920s, he had been an editor at *Vapaus* (Liberty), the newspaper of the Finnish Organization of Canada. Dismayed by FOC's "communistic, centralizing" tendencies, he quit the newspaper about 1930–31 to join forces with those seeking to end the FOC's control over the Finnish co-operative movement. Members of this anti-FOC faction succeeded in taking over the Co-operative Trading Association of Sudbury Limited (Co-Optas) and founding a new newspaper, *Vapaa Sana* (Free Press), to serve as its voice. When they failed take control of the Workers' Co-operative of New Ontario Limited, they founded the Consumers Co-operative Society, Limited. Tenhunen later worked for both the Consumers Co-op and *Vapaa Sana*.

sounds from our past—young people laughing, choirs singing, people cheering on athletes, and music playing as the girls perform their routines and the folk-dancers dance. Oh, so many happy memories! Tears sometimes fill my eyes as I think of those wonderfully active times and people. They are all just precious memories now.

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The Finnish Church, 1935–59

A Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church congregation was established in Timmins in 1935.* The lot on the corner of Cedar and Eighth Avenue was purchased for the church in 1938. However, it was not until Pastor

* EDITOR'S NOTE: There were only a few congregations belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland in this country before World War I. The Finnish-Canadian community was too small and fragmented to support more of them. Many Finns then living in Canada regarded themselves as free-thinkers or socialists who had little need of religion and churches. Even the so-called "Church" Finns included many religious dissenters—for example, the Laestadians—who preferred to found or join congregations not affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Nor was the church hierarchy in Finland all that concerned about its emigrant Finns, believing them to have willfully forsaken their homeland for the "gold-paved streets of Amerikka."

All that changed after the Finnish Civil War of 1918. "White" Finland now urged the state church to act as a bulwark of Finnish national and cultural identity against the further spread of international bolshevism in the Finnish immigrant communities abroad. The Finnish government and state church both assisted in the establishment of a Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church congregation in Montréal, the port of entry and stopover point for the great wave of Finnish immigration into Canada during the 1920s. With the subsequent spread of "White" newcomers across Canada, new Finnish Evangelical Lutheran congregations also began to appear elsewhere. That process was accelerated during the 1930s by the rush of defectors from the FOC. Many of them now wanted the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church to supplant the FOC as their core institution in the community.

Franz Koski became the minister did the congregation start to build a church. The work on it was begun in April 1946.

John Viitaniemi donated his time and expertise in drawing up plans for the building. Viitaniemi and Anton Lehtisalo were the main workers, and the only ones who received any pay. Still they did far more than what they were paid for. Most of the work was done by *talkoot*, or building "bees." Many of the men would go to the church and work for a few hours a day whenever they had any free time. Among the names of those men were: Messrs. Pynnönen, Seppä, Ryhänen, Mäkynen, Erkkilä, Pollari, Hovi, Kivioja, Loukusa, Sadeharju, Nisula and Lantala.

The church was finished in June 1947. Its dedication and celebration were held on June 7th and 8th, 1947. It was a lovely little church. The interior decorations were done by the women. The church had a good kitchen and dining facilities. Because so many Finnish people had donated their time and money towards the expenses, all of us felt that we had a part in the building of the church.

We wanted to start another ladies group at the church in 1958. Viola Seppä, Laura Maciak and I planned the first organizational meeting. Our purpose was to get back into the church those girls who had drifted away since marrying men of other nationalities. We also wanted to invite those girls to join who had married Lutheran boys. We conducted our meetings in English. We chose the name: Lutheran Ladies' Guild. Pastor Pentti Murto was the minister at that time.

We held two annual events for our church: a "Maytime Tea" and a "Christmas Tea and Bazaar." There were several very talented ladies in our club, and we worked on crafts under their leadership. We always tried to do something different at our events. For example, we held a "Rainbow Tea" in which we featured copper coffee-pots from Finland for serving coffee.

One of the biggest events we had was a "Finlandia Tea." It was held in the Goldfields Hotel Restaurant because our church was too small. The Senior Women's group assisted us. We had a huge bake sale. Over two hundred loaves of coffee-bread were sold there. That took a lot of phoning to all the Finnish women in town. We sold other things as well as baked goods, including raffle tickets on a cake and a large, circular coffee-bread. The girls serving tea wore national costumes. A

fashion show of Finnish national costumes was held with the owners of the costumes acting as models. I made a brief commentary on each costume noting which province of Finland it represented. The tea was a huge success and a first for this type of fashion show.

We put on many events. Working together was fun—and we formed lasting friendships.

When the Lutheran Ladies' Guild celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary, I received an invitation to attend. I was living in Elliot Lake then. However, because I had been its first president, I considered it an honour to go to the anniversary celebrations. It was so good to know that the Lutheran Ladies' Guild was still serving the church and that so many of the same ladies were still its faithful members.

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Elliot Lake, 1960–94

In the Fall of 1959, Paul was transferred to the post office in Elliot Lake. It was a good promotion for him, but it also meant that we had to move again. How I hated to leave Timmins. We sold our house on Cherry Street and bought another in Elliot Lake. It's the same one in which I am now living. When the school year was over, I prepared to leave with our two boys. We arrived in Elliot Lake on July 8th, 1960.

Elliot Lake is a beautiful town with many lakes, forest and terrific scenery. It is a real jewel in the wilderness. It is also famous for its uranium mines.

Due to the absence of the physical-education teacher at Elliot Lake Secondary School, Ernie Dixon, the school's principal, asked me to take over the girls' physical-education classes in 1962. I worked from January to the end of June that year. It was a perfect job because I only worked half-days and taught all the girls' classes in the school. I instructed them in calisthenics, in tumbling and apparatus work, and later, in the training of field sports.

A real challenge for me was the trampoline. I had never been on one, but the schedule demanded the teaching of basic stunts on it. After some study and practice on the trampoline, I was finally able to teach the basic movements. I showed my students the more advanced movements on the tumbling-mat, which they then performed on the trampoline.

The annual event of Elliot Lake High School was a two-night spring concert by the students called "Hilites." I assisted one of the teachers, John Martin, in directing the show in my first year at the school. That year's show featured many ethnic dance numbers, which involved a lot of work for the many teachers and students who participated in the concert. I myself instructed four couples in two Finnish folk-dances, "Raatikoon" and "Kerenski." That was a chore because none of them had ever danced before.

One of them was my son Lennard. I also picked out a group of girls to perform in a rhythmic exercise routine to music and, as well, organized a tumbling-and-pyramid display. I was so glad of my earlier experience in gymnastics and folk-dancing with the Finnish athletic clubs, all of which made it easy for me to put together those routines. The routines were acceptable to the physical-education classes that I was teaching. Alan Thicke was master of ceremonies that year. Even then he showed the talent that would later bring him fame in Hollywood.

When the twenty-fifth anniversary of Elliot Lake High School was held in 1981, many former students attended. Alan Thicke was among them together with his (then) wife, Gloria Loring. They entertained at the concert and were a great hit.

Because we had no Lutheran Church in Elliot Lake, I became a member of the United Church Women. I served on its executive for many years, and as president for one year. The UCW offered "Keep Fit" exercise classes in the basement of the church to one of its Community Interest Groups in 1966. I instructed that class. It was fun!

I am a member of the Hospital Auxiliary, and have served on its executive for two years. I even went to a convention in Toronto one year as one of its representatives. When we had the regional meeting in Elliot Lake, we once had the pleasure of sharing our coffee-hour with our local M.P. and his wife, Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson and Mrs. Pearson.

The Elliot Lake Recreation Department asked me to conduct exercise classes for women at the Collins Centre. They sent me for a weekend course in Sudbury. I held classes there for two years. The last class I had was for senior citizens at the Golden Age Club. I then had to retire completely from gymnastics because my arthritis was giving me a lot of trouble.

My husband was a member of the local Kiwanis Club. He served on the club's executive and, as well, a term as president. He was also the lieutenant-governor for the Northeastern Ontario Region for one year. It involved him in a lot of travelling and many projects. One of the bigger projects for the Elliot Lake club was the establishment of a Kiwanis park. The club's members put in many hours of labour into the children's playground. (How pleased Paul would have been to know that his grandchildren played there when they came to visit me.) Paul and I went to many Kiwanis conventions, including once to a week-long world convention in San Francisco. They were all fun and great experiences.

THE SILLANPÄÄ FAMILY, 1965
Paul and Nelma Sillanpää with their sons Lennard and Daryl at Christmas in Elliot Lake, Ontario.

Paul was one of the founding members of the Elliot Lake Swimming Pool Fund, serving as its treasurer. Our good friend, Ruben Juuti, was the president for many years, and we were all busy with that project. The swimming pool was officially opened in June 1976. Ruben later received the Elliot Lake Civic Award for his work on establishing the swimming pool.

We went on many holiday trips to Florida, and on two trips to Finland. On one of the trips to Finland, we attended the wedding of our son Lennard. He was then continuing his education at the University of Helsinki where he met a law student, Leena Kuusisto. They were married on November 9th, 1973. She has been a very welcome addition to our family.

Paul retired from the post office when he was fifty-four years old due to poor health. He had never been in perfect health since the war.

He always felt better after a holiday in Florida. He loved the sun. Our last trip there was in the fall of 1974. We had gone to Florida for the winter. He was ill most of the time. He died on February 17th, 1975. I brought him home to be buried in lovely Woodland Cemetery. It was his wish. He loved Elliot Lake.

NELMA SILLANPÄÄ, 1992
A photograph of Mrs. Sillanpää on the occasion of her seventy-fifth birthday.

Life takes a big turn when you become a widow! It was hard to get used to being alone. I mourned his loss for a while, and then began to get on with my life. I made new friends. I developed new interests and a new perspective on life. I started curling and golfing, sometimes forcing myself to go out and play. It wasn't long before I was enjoying those sports and the companionship of other ladies.

Pastor M. Schroder came here to Elliot Lake to establish the Faith Lutheran Church. I was one of the founding members. I also served on the church council for three years.

I became a member of the Sault Ste. Marie Chapter of the Kidney Foundation and served as the chapter's representative in Elliot Lake. I went to some of the Kidney Foundation's meetings and conventions. My husband had died of a kidney ailment. So, I was determined to have a group here to help other kidney patients. In January 1981, I called a meeting of everyone who would be interested in starting a local chapter. I was pleased to have nine people attend the first meeting. We received our Charter in March 1981 and, after that, our membership started to

grow. I was president for five years, David Folz for one year, and Al Watkinson for one year.

In 1988, the chapter's name was changed to the Northeastern Ontario Chapter of the Kidney Foundation and its head office was located in Sudbury. (I feel that it has been better for us to be amalgamated with Sudbury.) Again I became the Foundation's representative and the liaison person in Elliot Lake. I served for three years on the Board of Directors. I was very pleased when I was recognized as the Volunteer of the Year for Northeastern Ontario by the Kidney Foundation in 1990 and again in 1994.

More importantly though, we were able to get our own dialysis centre here in Elliot Lake in 1989. The local hospital provided the necessary space, and Laurentian Hospital in Sudbury provided the rest. We have two hemo-dialysis machines and a trained nurse. Our local patients do not have to travel to Sudbury for dialysis anymore. We are receiving a grant from the government to expand those services from three days to six days per week with one more nurse. We now can serve more patients in this area. It has been a dream of mine come true.

So, now I'm enjoying life in this lovely city—golfing, playing bridge and travelling. I do my share for the Kidney Foundation. I'm still their representative. I'm a faithful member of the Lutheran Church.

Life is good!

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This is a select bibliography of English-language works on the Finnish-Canadian experience. These titles were chosen because they touch upon various issues raised in *Under the Northern Lights*. Perhaps the most comprehensive reference works on Finnish- and English-language publications and archival sources relating to the history of the Finnish-Canadian community still are my own *On the Archival Heritage of the Finnish Working-Class Movement* and *Archival Sources for the Study of Finnish Canadians*.

The latter work, *Archival Sources for the Study of Finnish Canadians*, includes a brief overview of the history of the Finnish-Canadian community. Two other titles also need be mentioned in that regard: Lennard Sillanpää's article, "Finns," in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, and Varpu Lindström-Best's booklet, *The Finns in Canada*. Although a book-length monograph in English on the subject has yet to be published, the many works noted below suggest that both historians and scholars in other disciplines have found the Finnish-Canadian past to be a fertile field for study.

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Under the Northern Lights

My Memories of Life in the Finnish Community of Northern Ontario

What was it like for young immigrant girls growing up in the lumber camps and mining towns of Northern Ontario in the 1920s? How did teenagers in Canada cope with the Great Depression of the "Dirty Thirties"? What did young women on the home front do during World War II while their menfolk were overseas with the Canadian forces? Selma Sillanpaa, in this delightfully written, warm, human, and oft-times humorous and poignant portrait of her life and times, shows us what ordinary life has been like for many women in Canada over the last 75 years. Because it also describes her involvement in the activities of the Finnish community of Northern Ontario, Mrs. Sillanpaa's autobiography serves as an important historical document in illuminating a largely unknown chapter of Canada's diverse multicultural heritage.

Dr. Laine's introduction and historical annotations, maps, bibliography and index, as well as his selection of the author's own photographs, enrich the value of *Under the Northern Lights* as a historical resource on the Finnish-Canadian community.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Selma Sillanpaa was born in the United States. She came to Canada in 1921 at the age of four with her Finnish immigrant parents. With the exception of several years spent in Hamilton, Ontario, and Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, she has lived most of her life under the "northern lights" of Northern Ontario. There she involved herself in the institutional life and activities of the Finnish-Canadian community through her work, and her long-held interest in sports and drama.

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